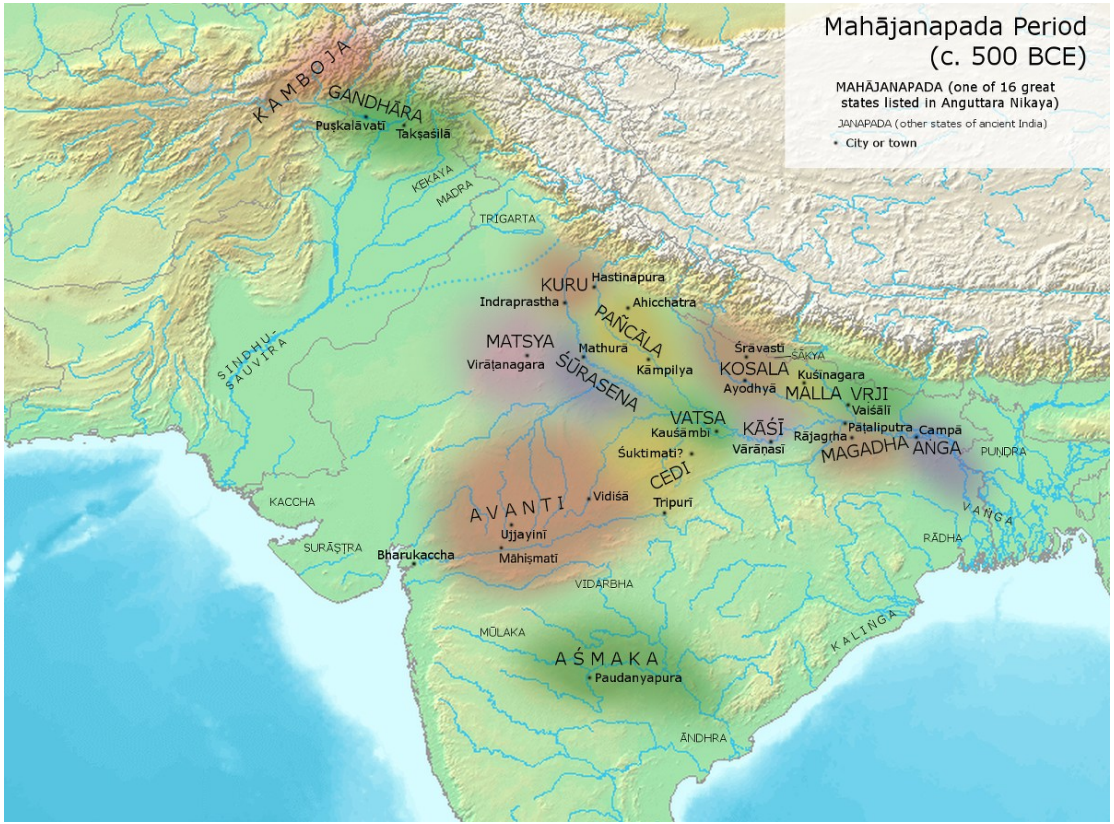
Conversations with the Buddha


Mahājanapada Period
(c. 500 BCE)
MAHĀJANAPADA (one of 16 great states listed in Anguttara Nikaya)
JANAPADA (other states of ancient India)
City or town
KAMBOJA
GANDHĀRA
Puṣkalāvatī
Takṣaśilā
KEKAYA
MADRA
TRIGARTA
KURU
Hastinapura
Indraprastha
Ahicchatra
PAÑCĀLA
MATSYA
Virāṭanagara
Mathura
Kāmpilya
ŚŪRASENA
SINDHU-SAUVIRA
ŚĀKYA
Śravasti
KOSALA
Ayodhyā
Kuśinagara
MĀLLA
VRJI
Vaiśālī
VATSA
Kauśāmbī
KĀŚĪ
Vārāṇasī
Rājagṛha
Pāṭaliputra
Campā
MAGADHA
ANGA
PUNDRA
Śuktimati?
CEDI
KACCHA
AVANTI
Vidiśā
Tripurī
Ujjayinī
Māhiṣmatī
SURĀṢTRA
Bharukaccha
VIDARBHA
VANGA
RĀDHA
MŪLAKA
AŚMAKA
Paudanyapura
KALINGA
ĀNDHRA

Conversations with the Buddha

A Reader's Guide to the Digha Nikaya

THIRD EDITION

Alexander Duncan

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Mahajanapadas (c. 500 BCE).png by Avantiputra7 / Cc-by-sa-3.0

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To the Memory of Bhikku Ananda Metteyya (Allan Bennett, 1872–1923), who bore the flame of dharma to the West.

"In order for human birth to have some real meaning in this world one must leave some imprint." (Gendün Chöphel)

THREE REFUGES

"Infinite the Buddha, infinite is Dhamma, infinite the Order"
(*Anguttara Nikaya,* ii, 72)

I take my Refuge in the Buddha,
who is naught other than the Omniscience
of Space;
I take my Refuge in the Dharma,
that is naught other than the Omnipotent
Power of Truth;
I take my Refuge in the Sangha
that is naught other than the Omnipresent
Assembly of Enlightened Beings.
Omniscient Space,
Omnipotent Truth,
Omnipresent Assembly—
crafting these three into a
Wish-Fulfilling Jewel,
I abide.

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Preface

"Nobody listened to Him, that is why there is Buddhism."
Krishnamurti

This book compiles thirty-four talks that I presented to the members of the Buddha Center between November 2014 and June 2015 on the successive suttas of the Digha Nikaya, the first book of the Sutta Pitaka of the Pali Canon. There are translations and commentaries on specific suttas of the Digha Nikaya available online.

While the early Buddhist texts (EBTs), generally identified with the *nikayas* (lit. 'collections'), are regarded as canonical by the Theravadin Buddhist sect, the EBTs are by no means sectarian productions and are regarded as fundamental by all Buddhist schools, including the Eighteen Schools[1] and the Mahayana, including by the Tibetans. Therefore, the EBTs constitute the only proper basis for universal Buddhism. Moreover, an exegesis of the *nikayas* discovers many points of difference between the EBTs and so-called Theravada. One of my purposes in writing this book is to draw on modern approaches and currents of thought, based on comprehensive, synthetic-analytic, universalist, eclectic, and even esoteric hermeneutics, in order to bring out the true richness and diversity of the Buddha's teachings, rather than preselecting passages in order to justify some sectarian or academic theory. To those who criticize this approach, I can do no better than quote the Buddha himself:

[1] I refer to "the Eighteen Schools" as a synonym for 'basic' or fundamental Buddhism (*hinayana*), without any pejorative connotation intended.

"It is, brahmin, because of attachment to views, adherence to views, fixation on views, addiction to views, obsession with views, holding firmly to views that ascetics fight with ascetics."[2] In this book, I regard each sutta as a window, through which to compare and collate all other canonical suttas in order to arrive at a synthetic basis for a comprehensive understanding of the complete dharma. In order to keep my perspective as unbound as possible, I deliberately did not consult the commentaries, written centuries later, except to the extent to which they are incorporated or referred to by the translators that I consulted.

This book is mostly based on the English translation of Maurice Walshe, Deputy Director of the Institute of Germanic Studies, Vice-President of the Buddhist Society, and Chairman of the English Sangha Trust. Wisdom Publications, Boston, originally published this book in 1987. I also consulted the English translation of the Pali Text Society, published in three volumes in 1899, 1910, and 1921 respectively and translated by Rhys Davids under the title *Dialogues of the Buddha,* as well as the online translations on the Access to Insight website. I also refer to the Chattha Sangayana version of the

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[2] Quoted in Bodhi, *In the Buddha's Words,* p. 35. Cf.: "I do not see even one other thing on account of which unarisen unwholesome qualities of mind arise and arisen unwholesome qualities of mind increase and expand so much as on account of wrong view" (ibid, p. 213). The Pali word here rendered 'wrong view' is *ditthi,* which can also mean 'dogma,' 'theory,' 'belief.' Walshe suggests 'speculative views.' The Buddha associates speculative views with rites and rituals, and he discourages attachment to speculative opinions. The extreme Theravadin view that this means that he has no ontology is itself a form of *ditthi*. The Buddha's teaching method is to seek a common frame of reference (common ground), and (he says) ultimate knowing is beyond ratiocination. Nevertheless, the Buddha teaches the dharma based on philosophical discussion for the final forty-five years of his life after his enlightenment experience, contradicting any suggestion that intellectual cultivation is trivial. It is as impossible to restrict truth to time-bound historically and culturally contingent systems, dogmas, rules, rituals, and codes, as certain sectarians have it, as it is to abandon thinking altogether. Clearly, both extremes violate the Middle Way and are, therefore, non-dharmic. Indeed, it may be argued that sectarians violate the fourth rule entailing defeat, against claiming realizations that one does not have, and thus are not even Buddhist at all.

original Pali text, as well as the great *Pali-English Dictionary* (PED) of the Pali Text Society and other Pali dictionaries online.

The challenge in commenting on the suttas in this way is the "mutual interdependence" of concepts. Many Buddhist concepts are alluded to in numerous suttas, with variations and differences that must be taken into account in order to arrive at a true synthetic understanding. Moreover, many doctrines and ideas mutually qualify each other and may lead to wrong conclusions if they are not compared with one another. A minute collation of every single occurrence of every concept in every sutta is needed. I hope that with the imminent arrival of powerful search engines with natural-language capabilities, it will be possible to analyze and publish a Pali-English concordance of the whole Pali Canon and, ultimately, arrive at a comprehensive and meticulous consolidation of the entire philosophy of the Buddha, in detail, excluding nothing. In the meantime, the present work is in the service of the Dharma Transmission to the West, in which (I believe) lies the sole hope for the survival and, indeed, the flourishing of humanity at this time of global social, political, and environmental crisis and ultimate disaster, leading up to the final manifestation of Shambhala.

NOTE ON PALI AND SANSKRIT TERMS

I refer to Pali and Sanskrit terms either on their own or in association with English translations. In the service of readability for a non-technical audience, as well as the ongoing Anglicization of important Buddhist terms, I follow the conventional spellings while eliminating the diacritics that indicate nuances of pronunciation not relevant in a printed text. This approach is becoming more common, e.g., the search engines for Pali dictionaries online no longer use diacritics, vastly easing the search process. In general, I use Pali terms in connection with quotations and other words cited directly from the Pali Canon. However, where the Sanskrit version of the word is already Anglicized, I generally use that word in preference to the Pali word. Anglicized Buddhist terms do not appear in italics.

NOTE ON SEXIST LANGUAGE

I use non-gender-specific personal pronouns wherever possible (e.g. 'monastic' instead of 'monk,' 'they' instead of 'he' or 'she,' etc.). However, where the context refers specifically to a particular gender, I retain the gender-specific personal pronoun. I do not change the personal pronouns in quotations.

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I would like to take this opportunity to thank my grade 4 teacher, Mrs. Peckover, who encouraged me to dedicate my life to the pursuit of the highest spiritual truth, and my gurus and teachers, including Guru Rinpoche, W.B., Dodrak Tulku, Mahatma Sri Paramananda Guru Swamiji, Sogyal Rinpoche, Prof. Suwanda H.J. Sugunasiri, Prof. Robert Thurman, Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche, Dr. Alex Berzin, Charles Atkins, Michael Stone, Sean Hillman, Bhikku Sujato, and of course His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Thank you and bless you all. *Namaskar.*

Division of the Code of Moral Practice

The Sublime Net

Digha Nikaya 1

Country: Magadha
Locale: Round Pavilion in the royal park of Ambalatthika
Speakers: Suppiya, Brahmadatta, the Buddha

The Brahmajala Sutta is the first sutta of the Digha Nikaya, the first book of the Sutta Pitaka. The Pali word *nikaya* means 'collection.' *Sutta Pitaka* may be translated as 'container of discourses.' Before we discuss the Brahmajala Sutta specifically, I will discuss the Pali Canon itself, since there are Buddhists who study the secondary literature exclusively or Mahayana Buddhists who only study the later sutras and are not familiar with pre-sectarian Buddhism.

According to tradition, Ananda, the personal attendant (*upatthaka,* lit. 'servant') of the Buddha for the last twenty-five years of his life, when the Buddha was between 55 and 80 years old, memorized the Buddha's teachings as he gave them. By this time, the sangha is more or less established and there are already questions arising as to how to preserve the authenticity of the teachings. Several months after the Buddha's passing (*parinibbana*), during the rainy season, which most sources place between July and October, the sangha met to discuss this question. The Buddha's barber, Upali, recited the Vinaya, which finalized the *patimokkha,* the rules of the order, as they had developed over the course of the Buddha's life. Ananda recites the discourses of the Buddha as he heard them. Others were involved too, because not all the suttas are attributed

to Ananda.[3] These become the nuclei of the Vinaya and Sutta Pitakas respectively, the Abhidhamma being a later production (third century BCE).

The First Buddhist Council occurred about the year 400 BCE, according to an increasing number of scholars.[4] This is a significantly more recent date than the conventional date of 544 BCE. Since the Buddha died at about 80 years of age, his dates are about 480–400 BCE. Bhikku Bodhi, Richard Gombrich, Maurice Walshe, K.R. Norman, and many others accept this chronology. From the perspective of authenticity, the later date is a good thing, though this is not the reason for the change.

Over the course of the next three hundred years, the sangha recited the *patimokkha* twice a month, and the full Vinaya and Sutta Pitakas at unknown intervals, including at the first four Buddhist councils, which were held about 400 BCE, 300 BCE, 250 BCE, and in the first century BCE. It is clear that during this time the core content received directly from the Buddha's first followers was codified, clarified, copied, and passed down through a rigorous process of oral transmission.[5] Although there are no physical books from that time, the suttas themselves show the evidence of this process of preservation, including the use of repetition, stock phrases, and versification.[6] Additional works were also added to the canon based on older traditions.

The Pali language in which the canon is preserved is a prakrit, a vernacular Indic language, related to Ardhamagadha ('half

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[3] For example, D 10 is attributed to Ananda, D 23 to Kumara-Kassapa, and D 28, 33, and 34 are attributed to Sariputta. These are all canonical. There are many more examples in the Majjhima Nikaya.

[4] See Narain, review of *Dating of the Historical Buddha.*

[5] This is not something unfamiliar to Indians, who passed down the Vedas in this way for about two thousand years.

[6] Arguments for the authenticity of the Pali Canon are given in Sujato and Brahmali, *Authenticity of the Early Buddhist Texts.* This book reprints the article of the same name published by the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies. Hajime Nakamura believes that the verse sections of the Pali Canon are, in general, older than the prose sections.

Magadhi'), in which the Jain scriptures are written. The earliest use of prakrit is attributed to Ashoka by the third century BCE. Originally identified with Magadhi, after the northeast Indian state of Magadha, where the Buddha spent much of his time, Pali is now regarded as a partly Sanskritized mixture of several prakrit languages dating from about the third century BCE. It is believed that Pali is an artificial hybrid language that was developed by the Buddhists of the time as a lingua franca in order to preserve the suttas in a common tongue and to communicate with each other.[7] The fact that this needed to be done shows that Buddhism was beginning to diversify linguistically, doctrinally, and geographically, which means that the Pali Canon as we have it is a composite.

First written down in Sri Lanka in the first century BCE, the Pali Canon seems to have been consolidated in western India, whereas the Buddha died in northeast India, so the tradition that is ultimately codified in the Pali Canon clearly went through successive phases of development as it moved from east to west and then south to Sri Lanka before being written down.

It seems likely that what we know as the Pali Canon achieved something close to its final form prior to the time of Ashoka, who is never mentioned or alluded to in the Pali Canon. Since Ashoka converted to Buddhism in about 263 BCE, this is only about 140 years after the passing of the Buddha. For comparison, therefore, the Pali Canon corresponds to the state of development of Christianity in the second century CE, which is the time of the Apostolic Fathers, the early Christian theologians who codified the faith.

Early in the first century BCE, Sri Lanka experienced a famine during which many monastics died. Up to that time, the oral transmission of the dharma was rigorously maintained, but it was now feared that it might be lost, so the Pali Canon was committed to writing on smoked and dried palm leaves. Since palm leaf manuscripts are known to have existed as early as the fifth century BCE, and the Brahmi alphabet in which the edicts of Ashoka are written

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[7] See Bodhi, *Course in the Pali Language,* Lesson 1.

was invented during the third century BCE, some suttas of the Pali Canon may have been written down before the first century and consolidated in the Pali Canon.

The curvy alphabets peculiar to southern Indian and Southeast Asian alphabets are specifically adapted to writing on palm leaves, since angular letters tend to split the leaves. Palm leaf books were bound and sent to Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand, and the Philippines. Ultimately, the suttas were also translated into Chinese, Tibetan, and other languages. Each sect has its own canon, and scholars recently found an extensive Sarvastivadin canon in Afghanistan, which has been little studied. Written on birch bark and dated as early as the first century BCE, it is the oldest surviving Buddhist text. However, scholars are able to compare many versions of the texts and most now believe that the core set of suttas, the *nikayas,* are very consistent among the different sects, with doctrinal differences coming out more in the third section of the Pali Canon, the Abhidhamma. (Each sect has its own Abhidhamma.) Although the origin of the Pali Canon that we have today is Theravadin, a sect that originates in the eleventh century CE,[8] Peter Harvey opines that "the Theravadins, then, may have *added* texts to the canon for some time, but they do not appear to have tampered with what they already had from an earlier period."[9] However, this does not mean that the surviving suttas are entirely free from ideologically motivated editorial changes.

Although we cannot say that the Pali texts, not even the *nikaya* suttas, preserve the Buddha's actual words, Bhikku Bodhi and others note with some justification that they present a self-consistent philosophy, and we can certainly study what they *do* say as a basis for further evaluation. This seems to be an essential first step, yet often, as Peter Masefield ruefully points out in *Divine Revelation in the Pali Canon,* the accepted construction of Buddhist philosophy is all too often based on a superficial and partial reading

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[8] See Buswell Jr., *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism,* s.v. Theravada, p. 904.
[9] *Selfless Mind,* p. 9.

of the suttas rather than an extensive and rigorous comparative analysis of the whole work. This interpretation has now hardened into dogma, sometimes called "mainstream," "core," or "academic" Buddhism.

Richard Gombrich suggests that the alternate approach, whereby Pali linguists try to ferret out the original words of the Buddha based on purely linguistic criteria, is discredited, such scholars tending to find what they want to find.[10] Moreover, just because a text is more recent does not mean that it does not incorporate older ideas. More recent texts may also incorporate legitimate inferences implied but not explicit in the earlier texts, or they may systematize older doctrines gathered from multiple sources, and thus represent legitimate processes of clarification and consolidation. They may even present original spiritual insights arising from authentic spiritual practice based on the *Buddhadharma,* and are thus "Buddhist."

The more deeply one studies the Pali Canon, the clearer it is that, as Rupert Gethin, the current President of the Pali Text Society, has said, the whole history of Buddhism may be seen as a working out of the implications of the early suttas.[11]

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The Brahmajala Sutta is the third longest sutta in the Digha Nikaya—second, if we exclude sutta 33, which is a summary. Contrary to what one might infer from the name, the suttas of the Digha Nikaya are not only the longest suttas in the *nikayas,* though the *average* sutta is about twice as long as the average sutta in the Majjhima Nikaya. Thus, the suttas of the Digha and Majjhima Nikayas are not arranged as in the Qur'an, where the suras are in non-chronological order from longest to shortest. Therefore, the title of the Digha Nikaya, 'the long collection,' raises the question of why

[10] Cf. his *Theravada Buddhism,* pp. 20f.
[11] *Foundations of Buddhism,* p. 43.

some shorter suttas are included here and other, longer suttas are included in in the Majjhima Nikaya.[12]

Walshe mentions that there is no satisfactory translation of the word *sutta,* from Sanskrit *sutra,* 'string' or 'thread,' hence, 'strings of doctrines hanging together like threads' or perhaps 'that which like a thread runs through and holds together everything.' The *Pali-English Dictionary* (PED) says it comes from SIV, 'to sew.' Hence, 'that which is sewn together,' an assemblage or book. All these are possible.

Maurice Walshe translates *brahmajala sutta* as 'the Supreme Net.' In Pali, *jala* means 'net' or 'entanglement.' Brahma refers to Brahma, the Creator, in the Vedic, or Brahman, religion, but Buddhism rejects the concept of a supreme deity, all deities (or devas) in Buddhism being limited and relative beings. Therefore, it is interesting that this, the first sutta of the Sutta Pitaka, is largely about what the teaching is *not,* to use the subtitle. Let us examine this word, 'Brahma.'

Brahmas, in Buddhism, occupy the lowest levels of the form world of samsara, called the 'Retinue of Brahma' (*brahma-parisajja devas*), 'Ministers of Brahma' (*brahma-purohita devas),* and the 'Great Brahmas' *(maha brahmas).* The beings that inhabit these realms enjoy the first jhana, or 'meditative attainment,' characterized by dispassion. The most famous inhabitant of this realm is God, who is the first deva (the word literally means 'shining one')

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[12] Scholar Joy Manné proposes that each *nikaya* addresses a different audience and need. Thus, the Digha Nikaya is directed at a non-Buddhist audience that is interested in learning more about Buddhist beliefs with the possibility of conversion, whereas the Majjhima is directed at a committed Buddhist audience that is consolidating Buddhist doctrines and practices around the memory of the Buddha. Bhikku Bodhi extends this analysis to include the Samyutta and Anguttara Nikayas, which he associates with a committed Buddhist audience that is seriously engaged in dharma study and practice. The Samyutta Nikaya in particular is aimed at doctrinal specialists and advanced meditators. The Anguttara, on the other hand, is practical and oriented toward householders and lay Buddhists as well as monastics in training. See Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha,* Vol. 1, pp. 31–34.

to be born into a new world. He perceives that he is alone, so he jumps to the conclusion that he is the creator and lord of the universe—a great delusion. The description suggests the demiurge of the Gnostic religion, which makes one wonder if Buddhism influenced Gnosticism. Edward Conze and Elaine Pagels suggest it did, but the view is not widely accepted academically.

That said, the Buddha is sometimes asked how to achieve Union with Brahma and, in a remarkable anticipation of Christianity, he recommends the metta meditation on compassion to this end. Those who succeed in this practice are reborn in the Brahma realm, which is the lowest level of the form (sometimes translated as 'fine material') world, characterized by individuality but without sensual desire. The Brahma world is very similar to the Judaeo-Christian concept of "heaven."

Sahampati, the Great Brahma, appears to the Buddha when he hesitates to teach, and entreats him to teach for the salvation of the people.

According to the PED, the word *brahma* comes from the root BRH, the root of *brahant,* which means 'to increase,' 'to be great or strong.' Rhys Davids relates it to the power or greatness of prayer or the ecstatic mind. In Buddhism, it refers to the supreme good, or a mystic formula, prayer, or mantra. Hence, the Brahmans chant the Vedic hymns, prayers, or mantras. In this context, *brahma* seems to mean simply 'great' or 'ultimate,' combined with 'net,' meaning 'entanglement' or delusion. Thus, this sutta concerns the great or ultimate entanglement, "what the teaching is not" in Walshe's words and, by implication, what the teaching *is.* Bodhi's translation, "the All-Embracing Net of Views," is somewhat odd in the context, though not impossible.

Most suttas begin with the expression, "Thus have I heard" (*evam me suttam*), a standard way of opening a narrative that the speaker knows by hearsay, not from personal experience. These words are traditionally ascribed to Ananda, who is reputed to have recited the entire text of the Sutta Pitaka from memory. However, in his article, "Thus Have I Heard," Maurice Walshe disposes of the

commentarial idea that the phrase was Ananda's in introducing the various suttas. These words simply identify a traditional sutta.

The location of the sutta is the main road between Rajagaha (modern Rajgir in the Nalanda district of the Indian state of Bihar), the ancient capital of Magadha, and Nalanda, about twelve kilometres (seven miles) north and a major trade route. Magadha was one of the sixteen 'great states' (*mahajanapadas*) and at the municipal level had nascent democratic administrations. It corresponds to southern Bihar and parts of east Bengal today. Magadha was a cultural centre that influenced both Jain and Buddhist beliefs. It was ruled by the Haryanka dynasty from 600 BCE, and consisted of about eighty thousand villages. Nalanda is the site of the famous Buddhist university named after the city, which flourished from the fifth to the twelfth centuries before Muslim invaders destroyed the site. It is said that its library burned for three months. At the time of the Buddha, it was a prosperous village.

The Buddha is travelling along this road with his entourage, followed by Suppiya and his younger disciple, Brahmadatta. Suppiya and Brahmadatta are *paribbajakas*, wandering religious mendicants. Some of these were Brahmans, who, unlike some other ascetics, went about clothed; they were philosophers who delighted in intellectual debate. In addition, Suppiya was a follower of Sanjaya Belatthaputta. The Buddha's two chief disciples, Sariputta and Moggallana, were former disciples of Sanjaya. Some bad blood seems to be involved on Suppiya's part. Sanjaya seems to have been a skeptical agnostic. Walshe calls him a positivist, neither affirming nor denying such things as other worlds, the fruits of karma, and life after death. Sanjaya and Brahmadatta were engaging in a vigorous discussion of the merits of the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha, which Sanjaya was denigrating and Brahmadatta defending, in voices loud enough to be heard by all apparently.

At the day's end, the Buddha, his entourage (to which the sutta assigns the unlikely number of five hundred monastics—inflating numbers is a common conceit of the Pali Canon), Suppiya, and Brahmadatta all stop together at the royal park of Ambalatthika, 'the mango sapling.' This seems to have been a kind of

rest house in the Bamboo Grove. Buddhaghosa says, "Here *Ambalatthika* is the king's park. At the entrance stood a young mango tree called *Ambalatthika* by the people. Consequently, the park itself came to be called *Ambalatthika*. It was well watered, shady, surrounded by a rampart, securely fastened with gates, and protected like a casket. Within the park was a house ornamented with magnificent paintings, for the king's relaxation. This was known as the royal rest-house."[13] Thus, there were two buildings in the park, one for the king's use, and one for the use of travellers.

Early next morning, the Buddha's entourage gets up and sits together in a place called the Round Pavilion, perhaps some sort of gazebo. Here it seems that they discussed the things that were being said by Suppiya and Brahmadatta about the Buddha, though this is rather obliquely expressed in the sutta. Sometime later, the Buddha joins the monastics and asks them what they are talking about.

The Buddha tells the monastics that they should not be angry, resentful, or upset with someone who disparages the Buddha, the dharma, or the sangha, as that would be a hindrance to them, since the emotion of anger would bias their judgment. Instead, they should simply explain what is incorrect, with an attitude of perfect dispassion. Similarly, the Buddha tells the monastics that they should not be pleased, happy, or elated with someone who praises the Buddha as that too would be a hindrance, since the emotion of happiness would also bias them. Instead, they should simply explain what is correct.

This first teaching of the Buddha in the Sutta Pitaka is refreshingly unique in the history of religions, since it discounts the value of emotion, whether of anger or happiness, and of faith in favour of calm reflection on the truth and, therefore, the importance of rational, objective analysis, even in the context of spiritual matters. This implies in turn that spiritual matters can be evaluated in this way, or such an injunction makes no sense. How few, even among

[13] Quoted in Nyanaponika, *Advice to Rahula,* n. 2.

Buddhists, recognize the importance of these two pivotal principles and apply them to their own mode of thinking in the spiritual realm.

The Buddha decisively separates Buddhism from every religion of which I am aware: "It is, monks, for elementary, inferior matters of moral practice that the worldling would praise the Tathagata."[14] The word that Walshe translates as 'worldling' is *puthujjana.* This is generally explained as *puthu,* 'many' + *jana,* 'folk'—an ordinary, ignorant person.

The Buddha uses the word *Tathagata* with reference to himself. The meaning of this word is somewhat mysterious. It is an epithet of an arhant, and non-Buddhists are assumed to have known what it meant. According to the PED, the compilers of the *nikayas* regarded it as pre-Buddhist, and yet the word has never been found in any non-Buddhist work.[15] In general, the Buddha uses it with reference to himself in the third person. Although the derivation is uncertain, the etymology may be glossed as follows:

TA: 'this,' 'that,' 'just this' (or 'that'), 'even this' (or 'these'), referring back to somebody or something just mentioned; or 'this now,' indicating something immediately after the statement of the speaker;
TATHA: 'so,' 'thus and not otherwise,' 'in this way,' 'likewise' (cf. TAT, 'that' in Sanskrit, referring to 'suchness' or 'reality as it is'); cf. TATTA, 'the real nature,' 'reality';
AGATHA: 'come,' 'arrived';
GA: 'going';
GATA: 'gone,' 'gone away,' 'arrived at,' 'directed to';

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[14] D 1.1.7

[15] Fyodor Shcherbatskoy claims to find evidence of the use of the word in the Mahabharata, referring to the invisible traces of those who have realized the truth (*Shantiparva*, 181.22). Although some elements of the Mahabharata may be traced back to Vedic times, perhaps as early as the eighth or ninth centuries BCE, the text is generally dated to no earlier than the fourth century BCE, and may therefore postdate the Buddha.

TA: [see above].

This is often glossed as 'he who has thus come and gone,'[16] commonly represented visually as a series of footsteps with no beginning and no discernible end. Buddhaghosa proposes eight possible meanings:

1. He who has arrived in such fashion.
2. He who walked in such fashion.
3. He who by the path of knowledge has come to the real essentials of things.
4. He who has won Truth.
5. He who has discerned Truth.
6. He who declares Truth.
7. He whose words and deeds accord.
8. The great physician whose medicine is all-potent.

Modern Sanskritists boil the meaning of the word down to two alternatives: 'the one who has gone to or arrived at *suchness*' or 'one like *that,*' with the implication of immobility or freedom from transience. In each case, 'suchness' or 'that' is essential but mysterious.

At the end of the sutta, the Buddha himself declares the nature of a tathagata:

> Monks, the body of the Tathagata stands with the link that bound it to becoming cut. As long as the body subsists, devas and humans will see him. However, at the breaking up of the body and the exhaustion of the life span, devas and humans will see him no more. Monks, just as when the stalk of a bunch of mangoes has been cut, all the mangoes on it go with it, just so the Tathagata's link with becoming has been cut. As long as the body subsists, devas and humans will see

[16] Herbert Guenther translates it as 'moving over and into the as-is' in his *Matrix of Mystery,* p. 215, n. 26.

> him. But at the breaking up of the body and the exhaustion of the life-span, devas and humans will see him no more. (3.73)

This statement need not imply that the Tathagata ceases to exist at death. In fact, the metaphor of the mangoes suggests the opposite. Rather, he ceases to exist as an ephemeral, samsaric being, and thus becomes invisible to samsaric beings, both devas and humans. The only thing remaining to keep the Buddha embodied is the energy or vitality of the 'life span' (*kappa*), after the exhaustion of which he will be freed forever from the cycle of rebirth.

Now that we have examined these words, which reoccur frequently throughout the suttas, let us look again at this remarkable statement. The Bodhi translation says, "It is, bhikkhus, only to trifling and insignificant matters, to the minor details of mere moral virtue, that a worldling would refer when speaking in praise of the Tathagata."[17] Rhys Davids refers to "trifling things, of matters of little value, of mere morality, that an unconverted man, when praising the Tathagata, would speak."[18] How utterly distinct from the self-righteous moralizing of religion this statement is! Many students say that morality is the essence of religion, from *religio,* 'moral obligation,' or *religare,* 'to bind fast.' For most religions, morality is all.

Even in Buddhism today, how often are we told that one must first perfect the rules of conduct, especially as a monastic, followed by meditation, in order to obtain wisdom, the final attainment—a construction that, as we shall see, is precisely the opposite of what the Buddha teaches. For many people, following the rules *is* the practice and the more rules one follows, the holier one must be. From this perspective, a male monastic is superior to a householder because he follows 227 rules, compared to 311 rules for a female monastic, and yet the greater number of rules for women is not an indication of superiority but rather of their (purported) inferior status

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[17] *Discourse on the All-Embracing Net of Views,* p. 53.
[18] *Dialogues of the Buddha,* p. 3.

as a female. However, the Buddha says that these are all elementary and insignificant matters, mere details that a common person would praise but not, by implication, a superior person.

THE SHORT SECTION ON MORALITY

Perhaps these are merely superficial ethical observances that have little or nothing to do with the spiritual life, like matters of etiquette. However, what the Buddha elaborates are not mere formalities. Rather, *he lists the essential rules of the entire Vinaya,* starting with Pansil, the Five Precepts, including not killing, not stealing, chastity, and not lying. *This is in the first sutta of the Sutta Pitaka that immediately follows the Vinaya.*

Note too that the Buddha does not mention alcohol, an omission that occurs frequently.[19] He then expands the list to include the Eight Precepts: eating at the wrong time; singing, dancing, playing music, attending shows; wearing perfume, and using cosmetics and garlands; and using high or wide beds.

The list expands to include the Ten Precepts, viz., accepting money.

The list continues to include not damaging seeds and crops; not accepting raw grain or flesh, women and young girls, male or female slaves, sheep and goats, cocks and pigs, elephants, cattle, horses and mares, fields and lots; not running errands, buying and selling,

[19] Originally, the Buddhist monastics were not prohibited from drinking alcohol. About eight years after the Buddha's Enlightenment, circa 432 BCE, the monastic Sagata was found lying on the ground unconscious outside the village gate of Kosambi. During the alms round, during a famine, he had consumed a cup of palm wine (the only food available presumably) at each house and passed out. In response, the Buddha prohibited the consumption of alcohol by monastics and denied full ordination to anyone who drank. Therefore, it seems that the content of those suttas, including this one, that do not include this rule in the Precepts must predate this decision. The suttas that follow refer to four precepts, excluding alcohol: D 1, 22, 25, 27, 29, 31. However, D 29 seems to be a late sutta, but still uses the fourfold version of the precepts that exclude alcohol.

cheating with false weights and measures, bribery and corruption, deception and insincerity.

The Buddha implies that these are superficial moral observances that, while appropriate, fall beneath the state of the Tathagata, who is far beyond such considerations, and that the admiration of the "worldling" for such things misses the point.

THE MIDDLE SECTION ON MORALITY

These observances are elaborated in greater detail and some new items are added, including not destroying seeds, not enjoying stored up goods, not attending displays, not indulging in idle pursuits, not using high and wide beds, not adorning oneself, refraining from unedifying conversation, refraining from disputes, refraining from errand running, and refraining from lying.

THE LARGE SECTION ON MORALITY

The Buddha describes making one's living by the practice of "base arts," including palmistry, divination, charms, fortune-telling, witchcraft, spells, spiritism, theism, magic, and purporting to cure disease.

Many of these observances are associated with Brahmanism, which the Buddha repudiated. The short and middle sections on morality appear to be an early version of the Vinaya rules, so esteemed by monastics, yet they are declared by the Buddha to be trivial! This is not the only place in the Pali suttas where the Buddha makes such statements about the Vinaya.[20]

The large section on morality includes a variety of observances with certain discernible characteristics, all subsumed under the heading 'base arts' (*tiracchanavijjaya*). Many of these correspond to practices that we would associate with magic, sorcery, or witchcraft. The third group is particularly associated with wrong livelihood by monastics, which has led some to suggest that these

[20] See A 3.84. Cf. ibid, 3.86–90.

practices are not necessarily prohibited in themselves, but only prohibited for monastics, but this interpretation is refuted by the phrase "base arts." This leads to some difficulties, however, because not all the observances described fit into what we might think of as "debased," including house and garden lore, foretelling a person's lifespan (insurance companies do this all the time), knowledge of animals' cries (being studied seriously by scientists), predicting astronomical phenomena, predicting earthquakes, predicting the weather, agricultural forecasting, accounting, computing, calculating, poetic composition, philosophizing, and medical arts, including prescribing drug remedies and surgeries.[21]

That completes the summary of the things for which the common person, the *puthujjana* or worldling, praised the Buddha, after which the Buddha says, "There are, monks, other matters, profound, hard to see, hard to understand, peaceful, excellent, beyond mere thought, subtle, to be experienced by the wise, which the Tathagata, having realized them by his own superknowledge,[22] proclaims, and about which those who would truthfully praise the Tathagata would rightly speak."[23]

Based on this passage, we may further clarify the moral observances as superficial, the opposite of profound; obvious, the opposite of hard to see; easy to understand, the opposite of hard to understand; conceptual, the opposite of beyond mere thought; and to be experienced by the ignorant, the opposite of to be experienced by the wise. Therefore, the Tathagata himself is also profound, hard

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[21] One theme that runs through these items is that of prediction, which the Buddha seems to associate with magic. Science in the Buddha's day was not what it is today. Perhaps he saw some subjects that we might regard as science today as pseudoscience or harmful. In any case, the inclusion of these items confirms that we cannot interpret the suttas in a naive literalist or fundamentalist way. We should regard them seriously, but try to discern their essential underlying intent, without being misled by superficialities or falling into superstitious reverence for rites, rituals, and dogmatic beliefs.

[22] This is Walshe's translation of *abhinna,* 'transcendent realization' (Skt. *abijna*).

[23] D 1.31.

to see, hard to understand, peaceful, excellent, beyond mere thought, subtle, and to be experienced by the wise. The reference to 'superknowledge' (*abhinna*) is an extension of "beyond mere thought." The implication is that there is a wisdom that transcends mere logic, which is reserved for those who attain to it, and which transcends mere morality. Buddhist morality is beyond mere virtuous observances; it implies a qualitative transformation. In English, we have a word for this kind of wisdom: *gnosis.* This trans-rational knowledge or wisdom was the special concern of the early gnostics, both Christian and non-Christian, before the Roman Church destroyed them as enemies. The message is that, while morality may be necessary, it is superficial and even unsatisfactory. We will elaborate this under *upaya,* 'skilful means.'

THE SIXTY-TWO KINDS OF WRONG VIEWS

In the next section, "The Sixty-Two Kinds of Wrong Views," the Buddha shifts from moral observances to an itemization of erroneous philosophical assertions. This is essentially a catalogue of philosophical views held by other schools at the time of the Buddha, including eighteen speculative theories about the past and forty-four speculative theories about the future.

All these pertain to various views of the nature of the self and the world, and are based on one or a combination of three modes of reasoning: empirical observation, logical or rational argument, and direct intuition.

SPECULATIVE THEORIES ABOUT THE PAST

The Buddha identifies four theories that he calls Eternalist, four theories that he calls partly Eternalist and partly Non-eternalist, four theories that he calls Finitist and Infinitist, four theories that he calls eel wriggling, and two theories that he calls chance origination.

SPECULATIVE THEORIES ABOUT THE FUTURE

Similarly, the Buddha identifies the following speculative theories about the future: sixteen doctrines of Conscious Post-mortem Survival, eight doctrines of Unconscious Post-mortem Survival, eight doctrines of Neither Conscious Nor Unconscious Post-mortem Survival, seven doctrines of Annihilationists, and five ways of proclaiming Nirvana Here and Now.[24] These make up forty-four theories. These two groups of theories make up sixty-two wrong views.

From the foregoing one arrives at the list of nine essential theories that follow:

1. Eternalism;
2. Partly Eternalism and Partly Non-eternalism;
3. Finitism;
4. Infinitism;
5. Eel Wriggling;
6. Chance Originationism;
7. Post-mortem Survivalism;
8. Annihilationalism; and
9. Nirvana Here and Now.

The first six concern the past and the last three concern the future. Let us examine these, remembering that the Buddha rejected them all.

Eternalism asserts that the self and the world are eternal based on four arguments. First, remembering past lives, which results from a state of mental concentration or meditation. This is interesting in itself, in that the Buddha attained this state when he was enlightened. The spontaneous arising of past-life memories has also

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[24] *Nibbana* (Skt. *nirvana*) etymologically is *ni,* signifying negation ('un-'), + *va,* 'to blow' (Skt. 'air,' 'wind') or *vr,* 'to cover' (Skt. 'surround,' 'restrain,' 'obstruct,' 'enclose,' 'circumscribe'), with connotations of smothering or blowing out, as of a fire or a fever; hence, a state of health characterized by the absence of agitation (PED).

been documented in recent times in the context of near death experiences, psychedelic experiences, kundalini awakening, Rolfing, and various traumatic experiences. Dr. Ian Stevenson has studied thousands of cases of spontaneous past-life memory in children. However, the eternalist infers from these experiences that the self and the world are immortal.

The second view is similar to the first, except that one period of universal contraction and expansion is remembered as distinct from past lives. The third is almost the same as the second, except that multiple periods of contraction and expansion are remembered. Whereas the first three arguments are essentially empirical, the fourth argument is based on a priori logical reasoning. The Buddha accepts these experiences as fact, but rejects the eternalist inference.

The **Partly Eternalism and Partly Non-eternalism** doctrine is the view that God is eternal but that subordinate beings are not eternal. The first argument for this view is that when a lower world contracts the beings living in that world are reborn in a higher world not subject to contraction.[25] After a long time the lower world begins to expand again and a being from a higher world is reborn there, either from exhaustion of his life span or the exhaustion of his merit, which are the same thing. When other beings appear, he thinks that he is the First Cause, and they think that he is God. The ascetic who remembers one past life because of meditation concludes that the first being is permanent and that the later beings are all impermanent. Thus, he believes that the world is partly eternal and partly non-eternal.

The second argument is, like the first, based on the recollection of a single past life because of meditation. In this case, the ascetic in his past life was a type of deva called "Corrupted by Pleasure." These hedonistic devas fall into the human state. When they remember this past life, they conclude that the devas who are not hedonistic are permanent, while they are impermanent; therefore,

[25] This doctrine remarkably presages modern scientific cosmology.

the world is partly eternal and partly non-eternal. The third argument is like the second, except that in this case the ascetic remembers a previous birth as a class of deva called "Corrupted in Mind." These dwell in the realm of the Four Great Kings (*catumaharajika devas*), the next plane above the human world. Instead of being corrupted by pleasure, these beings are corrupted by envy. Seeing the long life of the non-envious devas, they fall into the same error, believing those devas to be eternal and themselves non-eternal. The fourth argument is also an a priori logical or rationalist argument in which the objects of the five senses are perceived to be impermanent but mind is believed to be permanent, and so the same conclusion as above is arrived at.

Finitism is the belief that the world is finite and bounded, **Infinitism** that the world is infinite and unbounded. The Buddha also refers to the beliefs that the world is both finite and infinite and that it is neither finite nor infinite. This is the first reference to a logical structure that we also find in later suttas:

1. X is Y;
2. X is not Y;
3. X is both Y and not-Y; and
4. X is neither Y nor not-Y.

This construction, called the 'fourfold negation,' *tetralemma* or *catuskoti,* is a feature of Indian classical logic that is made much use of by the Buddha.

Each of these beliefs corresponds to a separate argument, but each one amounts to the same thing—the direct realization of the fact because of meditation. Thus, these are less arguments than direct intuitions.

The '**Eel Wrigglers**' (*amaravikkheppika*), which can also be translated as 'endless equivocators,' are agnostics who refuse to commit themselves to any view, but simply say, "I don't say this, I don't say that. I don't say it is otherwise, I don't say it is not. I don't

not say it is not."[26] This belief, if we can call it that, is based on the desire to avoid lying, attachment, and cross-examination, which comes simply from not knowing. These are the first three arguments. (The fourth argument is because one is dull and stupid.)

The final category in the group of speculations about the past is that of the **Chance Originationists.** This is the belief that the self and the world arise by chance, and it is based on two arguments. (1) A deva who belongs to the class called 'Unconscious' (*asannasatta)* is reborn in the human state, and because of mental concentration they remember their birth. From this, they conclude that before they did not exist, now they exist, thus they have arisen by chance. (2) The second argument is an a priori logical argument that the self and the world must arise by chance.

The next group of speculations concerns the future. **Post-mortem Survivalism** asserts that after death the self is healthy and conscious and material, immaterial, both material and immaterial, neither material nor immaterial, finite, infinite, both, neither, of uniform perception, varied perception, limited perception, unlimited perception, happy, miserable, both, and neither (note the recurrence of the *tetralemma*). These are the sixteen beliefs, which really boil down to four logical variations of four fundamental axioms regarding materiality, finitude, limitation, and happiness.

The doctrine of **Unconscious Post-mortem Survival** is based on two underlying views in all four alternatives discussed above, that after death the self is healthy and unconscious and material or finite (four alternatives each).

The **Neither Conscious Nor Unconscious Post-mortem Survivalists** hold that the self is healthy and neither conscious nor unconscious with the same eight variations as above.

The **Annihilationists** believe that the self is destroyed at death, but differ as to the nature of that self. The first view of the self is that it is:

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[26] D 1.2.24.

1. Material, composed of four elements (or states of matter), and the product of mother and father (or male and female genes). *This corresponds to the dominant view of scientific materialism or secularism.*

The next six views all accept the reality of the first view, but add a second self that also dies. This self is variously held to:

2. Be divine, material, sensory, and made of real food;
3. Be divine, material, mind-made, complete and not defective in any sense organ (a kind of "mental body");
4. Have attained the Sphere of Infinite Space (the first plane of the Formless Realm);
5. Have attained the Sphere of Infinite Consciousness (the second plane of the Formless Realm);
6. Have attained the Sphere of Nothingness (the third plane of the Formless Realm); and
7. Have attained the Sphere of Neither Perception Nor Non-perception (the fourth and highest plane of the Formless Realm).

The final speculation regarding the future is that of **Nirvana Here and Now.** These are five views regarding the realization of nirvana here and now by existent beings:

1. The self experiences nirvana when it indulges in the pleasures of the five senses.
2. The self experiences nirvana when it experiences the first meditative attainment, characterized by thinking, pondering, dispassion, delight, and happiness. *This view rejects the previous view because of angst.*
3. The self experiences nirvana when it experiences the second meditative attainment, characterized by inner tranquility and mental concentration, free from thinking and pondering, born of concentration, and accompanied by delight and joy. *This view rejects the previous view because of thinking and pondering.*

4. The self experiences nirvana when it experiences the third meditative attainment, characterized by waning of delight, equanimity, awareness[27] and clarity, and bodily joy. *This view rejects the previous view due to mental exhilaration.*
5. The self experiences nirvana when it experiences the fourth meditative attainment, characterized by the abandonment of pleasure and pain, the disappearance of joy and grief, equanimity, and attention. *This view rejects the previous view due to joy.*

At the end of this dissertation, the Buddha comments on all these views using the same language:

> This, monks, the Tathagata understands: These viewpoints thus grasped and adhered to will lead to such-and-such destinations in another world. This the Tathagata knows, and more, but he is not attached to that knowledge. And being thus unattached he has experienced for himself perfect peace, and having truly understood the arising and the passing away of feelings, their attraction and peril and the deliverance from them, the Tathagata is liberated without remainder.
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> These, monks, are those other matters, profound, hard to see, hard to understand, peaceful, excellent, beyond mere thought, subtle, to be experienced by the wise, which the Tathagata, having realized them by his own super-knowledge, proclaims, and about which those who would truthfully praise the Tathagata would rightly speak. (3.30)

It is easy to leap to the conclusion, based on the foregoing, that the Buddha holds no views on the nature of the self and the world, that he rejects ontology, since all the sixty-two wrong views relate to the nature of the self and the world in one way or another, including empiricism, rationalism, and "intuitionism." Such a view

[27] In this book I use 'awareness,' 'attention,' and 'mindfulness as more or less equivalent translations of *sati*.

makes the Buddha an agnostic or even a nihilist. However, I will argue that this view of the Pali Canon is fallacious.

In the context of this sutta, I would point to the Buddha's rejection of the eel wrigglers: "When asked about this or that matter, they resort to evasive statements, and they wriggle like eels on four grounds."[28] In fact, the Buddha is quite judgmental about eel wriggling, this being the only view the adherents of which he characterizes as dull and stupid. If one reads his conclusion with attention, one notices various statements that imply more than simply not knowing: "the Tathagata *understands*…the Tathagata *knows,* and more, but he is not attached to that *knowledge…beyond mere thought, subtle,* to be experienced by the *wise,* which the Tathagata, having realized them by his own *super-knowledge,* proclaims, and about which those who would truthfully praise the Tathagata would rightly *speak*"[29] (italics added).

If we reject ontology altogether, we are left only with moral practices, which the Buddha makes clear is not appropriate when referring to the Tathagata. Moral practices are elementary. Rather, what the Buddha seems to be alluding to is a mode of knowing that *transcends* reason and that cannot be arrived at merely by experience, logic, or even direct intuition, which is referred to as the "super-knowledge" of the Tathagata, but which can be spoken of. The trans-logical character of this knowledge is shown by his frequent allusion to the *tetralemma*.

These sixty-two wrong views are suggestive of the Buddha's rejection of the idea of rebirth in any samsaric state because any samsaric state is subject to angst (*dukkha*). The Buddha rejects the religious notion of "heaven" altogether. Thus, he says, "these viewpoints thus grasped and adhered to will lead to such and such destinations in another world."[30] This is the concept of rebirth based on the Law of Karma—both ontological concepts.

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[28] D 1.2.23.
[29] D 1.28, 36.
[30] D 1.3.30.

Here two things must be distinguished: the viewpoint itself, which the Buddha designates as "wrong view," and the attachment that leads to samsaric rebirth. The Buddha says, "This the Tathagata knows, and more"—implying a superknowledge that transcends wrong view—"but he is not attached to that knowledge."[31] Thus, two things are necessary: the acquisition of a trans-rational superknowledge that transcends and corrects the sixty-two wrong views, and dispassion. In other suttas, the Buddha warns his followers against sectarian attachment to rites, rituals, and dogmas. Similarly, when encountering a disputant who does not share the Buddha's world-view, the Buddha seeks out common ground, and bases any further discussion with them on that, and reasoning from there. Invariably, he leads the inquirer to a higher, larger view, not a lower, smaller view. Thus, he rejects disputatiousness altogether as a method of knowing.

The relationship between knowledge and attachment is made explicit at the end of the sutta, where the Buddha summarizes the sixty-two wrong views, saying of each one, "that is merely the feeling of those who do not know and see, the worry and vacillation of those immersed in craving."[32] The implication is that these views are personal, subjective, and rooted in craving or desirous attachment. At the same time, it is clearly implicit that there is something to know and see and that there are those who know and see ("the wise"), since falsehood and error can only be identified in relation to truth. The Buddha analyzes the nature of feeling and craving with reference to contact, the six senses, desirous attachment, becoming, birth, ageing and death. These are the fifth through twelfth *nidanas,* or 'causes,' in the chain of interdependent origination (*paticcasamuppada*).

The Buddha says, "When, monks, a monk understands as they really are the arising and passing away of the six bases of contact,

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[31] Ibid.
[32] D 1.3.32.

their attraction and peril, and the deliverance from them, he knows that which goes beyond all these views."[33] The six bases of contact are the organs of the six senses—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind—affirming that the superknowledge of a tathagata is transmental and that such superknowledge is not unknowable but is attainable by realization, despite the previous rejection of direct intuition as a reliable method of obtaining truth.

The Buddha denigrates the views of the ascetics and Brahmans who speculate about the past and/or the future as both "fixed" and "speculative": "these are all trapped in the net with its sixty-two divisions, and wherever they emerge and try to get out, they are caught and held in this net. Just as a skilled fisherman or his apprentice might cover a small piece of water with a fine-meshed net, thinking: 'Whatever larger creatures there may be in this water, they are all trapped in the net, caught, and held in the net,' so it is with all these: they are trapped and caught in this net."[34]

Armed with this information, let us look again at the nine theories in the light of what we know about Buddhist principles, and see if we can discern the essential error in each case. To recap:

1. **Eternalism** is the belief that that self and the world are eternal.
2. **Partly Eternalism and Partly Non-eternalism** is the belief that the self and the world are partly eternal and partly non-eternal. *Note that the third logical category, non-eternalism, is absent. Here is our first clue.*
3. **Finitism** is the belief that the world is finite and bounded.
4. **Infinitism** is the belief that the world is infinite and unbounded.
5. **Eel Wriggling** is agnosticism. *That the Buddha rejects this doctrine is our second clue.*

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[33] D 1.3.71.
[34] D 1.3.72.

6. **Chance Originationism** is the belief that the self and the world arise by chance.
7. **Post-mortem Survivalism** is the belief that after death the self is healthy and conscious.
8. **Annihilationalism** is the belief that after death the self is healthy and unconscious.
9. **Nirvana Here and Now** is the belief that the self experiences nirvana in some state.

The key to understanding the Buddha's rejection of all these theories lies in the Buddha's repeated reference to attachment. Attachment leads to samsaric rebirth. What is attachment? It posits self-identity, stasis, and satisfactoriness, whereas we know from other suttas that the Three Marks of Existence (*tilakkhana*) are non-self-identity, transience, and angst. If we apply this key to the nine theories just enumerated, we find that each one contains a vital flaw that leads to attachment. The views that the self and the world are eternal or even partly eternal, finite or infinite, arise by chance, survive death, or are annihilated, and achieve nirvana in a samsaric state (the fourth meditative attainment is still a samsaric state) all violate the Three Marks of Existence. Similarly, eel wriggling violates the Three Marks of Existence by denying that there is a knowable truth. Thus, we see that the key to the Buddha's repudiation of these theories is the fact of the desirous attachment that intrinsically posits self-identity, stasis, and satisfactoriness. We might call this process "objectification." Implicitly, therefore, the superknowledge of a tathagata is this realization of the Three Marks, which is an ontological realization, through which intuition is purified of attachment and thus, paradoxically, leads to the realization of the dharma-element, the TAT, 'suchness,' 'reality as it is,' beyond samsara, which *is* self-identical, permanent, and ecstatic.

Ananda asks the Buddha what this sutta should be called, implying that he is self-consciously memorizing the discourses with the Buddha's approval, and the Buddha replies that it may be called the Net of Advantage, the Net of Dharma, the Supreme Net (hence, Walshe's title), the Net of Views, or the Incomparable Victory in

Battle. The reference to Ananda implies that this is not the first sutta of the Buddha, but was rather delivered during the final twenty-five years of the Buddha's life, when the Buddha was between 55 and 80 years old, Ananda only becoming the Buddha's personal attendant twenty years after his Enlightenment. The sutta reports that the whole universe resonated with the Buddha's words. This is the only sutta in the Digha Nikaya of which this is said, which may explain its position as the first sutta, not just of the Digha Nikaya, but of the whole Sutta Pitaka.

The commentary says, "morality is inferior in comparison with higher qualities, for morality does not reach the excellence of concentration, nor concentration the excellence of wisdom."[35]

[35] Quoted by Walshe in *Long Discourses of the Buddha,* p. 537, n. 15.

Fruits of the Renunciant Life

Digha Nikaya 2

Country: Magadha
Locale: Jivaka Komarabhacca's mango grove, Rajagaha
Speakers: Ajatasattu Vedehiputta, Jivaka Komarabaccha, the Buddha

The second sutta of the Digha Nikaya is called the Samannaphala Sutta. Contrary to appearances, the immediate source of this title is not *samana*, a wanderer, but rather *samanna,* which refers to the state of being a monastic (lit. 'conformity,' 'generality'). According to the Access to Insight website, it also refers to an instrument tuned on pitch (from *sama,* 'even' + *anna,* 'reciprocally'), the subject of a famous metaphor of the Buddha. The root *sam* refers to 'calmness,' 'tranquility,' 'mental quiet,' whereas *anna* also has the meaning of 'knowledge,' especially the 'knowledge of an arhant.' In Sanskrit, *sama* has the meaning of 'middling,' 'good,' and 'happy,' whereas *anya* has the meaning of 'extraordinary.' *Phala* means 'product,' 'fruit,' 'reward.'

The Buddha is staying in the Magadhan capital of Rajagaha, in the mango grove of Jivaka Komarabhacca, the royal physician, with a large monastic entourage. The king, Ajatasattu Vedeheputta, is reclining on the roof of his palace during the sacred Catumasya festival, surrounded by his ministers, yet stricken in heart. The king murdered his father to gain the throne, yet, despite this appalling fact, he is contrite. This festival marks the night of the full moon (*uposatha*) of the final month of the four-month hybrid rainy-

autumn season ending in October-November, the month of Kattika. This is when the water lily blooms. Hence, the festival is also called Komudi ('water lily'). It is sacred to Krishna, and is the holiest month of the year for Vaishnavas.

The evening being fine and clear, the king expresses the desire to visit a sage, so his ministers list off the well-known teachers who are still in the area: Purana Kassapa; Makkhali Gosala; Ajita Kesakambali; Pakudha Kaccayana; Sanja Belatthaputta the agnostic in sutta 1; and Nigantha Nataputta (Mahavira), the leader of the Jains. The king shows no interest in visiting any of them. The royal physician remains silent during all of this time. The king asks Jivaka why he is silent. Jivaka tells the king that Gotama the Buddha is residing with his entourage in Jivaka's mango grove, and invites the king to meet him, to which the king readily agrees. The Buddha is the only one of the seven that the king has not met.

King Ajatasattu assembles his royal household, and he, Jivaka, and his harem of wives proceed by elephant to the mango grove. When the king comes near, it is dark and deathly quiet. He suspects a trap, but Jivaka assures him that it is safe. In the distance, he is able to see torches burning inside a round pavilion, so he makes his way there on foot, to find the Buddha sitting inside against the middle column of the pavilion, with many monastics sitting, facing him, all dressed in the simple patchwork robes of the Buddhist order. The king has to ask Jivaka which monastic is the Buddha, though the Buddha is sitting against the middle column of the pavilion.[36] Alternatively, the sutta states that the unlikely figure of 1,250 monastics are present in the Round Pavilion, so perhaps he is lost in the crowd.

As the king approaches the Buddha and stands beside him, "the order of monks continued in silence like a clear lake."[37] The king, marvelling at the composure of the assembly, compares the calm of

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[36] Perhaps contradicting the notion that the Buddha is so charismatic and handsome that he is unmistakable.

[37] D 2.12.

the monastics unfavourably to his son, Udayabhadda.[38] The Buddha's first words are, "Do your thoughts go to the one you love, Your Majesty?"[39]

The king prostrates to the Buddha and, turning, acknowledges the monastics, and then sits to one side, facing the Buddha. Ajatasattu asks the Buddha if there is any fruit or reward to leading a homeless life, instead of contributing to society through productive work and thereby gaining merit for a favourable rebirth. Before answering, the Buddha asks the king to tell him what the other ascetics and Brahmins he has consulted say.

Purana Kassapa expresses the view that there is no good or evil karma; thus, there is neither merit nor demerit, from which he draws the conclusion that "if with a razor-sharp wheel one were to make of this earth one single mass and heap of flesh, there would be no evil as a result of that."[40] *Today we would call him a nihilist.*

Makkhali Gosala holds that defilement is the inherent state of the person, who has to proceed through a preordained sequence of events, in a cosmological scheme extending over 4.8 million eons, each eon an incalculable interval, and a bewildering diversity of types and classes of beings. When all of this is completed, one achieves final liberation, but there is nothing that can be done to accelerate the process, so yoga is useless. *Gosala might be called a fatalist.*

Ajita Kesakambali is a materialist who believes that the body disintegrates into the elements at death and that the mind dissolves into space and ceases to exist. *Today we would call him a secular materialist.*

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[38] Udayabhadda would murder Ajatasattu, so he had reason to be concerned. Udayabhadda himself does not appear in this sutta.

[39] The redactor of this sutta seems to know about Ajatasattu's death, suggesting a date of composition no earlier than the early fourth century BCE. The event described is probably later in Ajatasattu's reign, since he is already concerned about his son, but prior to the Buddha's passing: say, about 400 BCE.

[40] D 2.17.

Pakudha Kaccayana has a strange theory of seven bodies that somehow are indestructible despite the appearance of mortality.

Niganta Nataputta (Mahavira) declares that liberation is attainable by self-restraint. In Jainism, only action counts. In Buddhism, action counts but only as the expression of intention. Thus, intention is the essential causative factor.

Sanjaya Belatthaputta we know as the agnostic who denies knowing anything.

What all these teachers have in common is that they offer *no* fruits for the homeless life. Thus, the king's quest is fruitless.

In the next section of the Samannaphala Sutta we see another side of King Ajatusattu, that of a devout man, for only a devout man would approve of the going forth so readily. The dialogue provides the Buddha with the opportunity to instruct the king in the fruits of the homeless life, illustrated by the use of metaphors.

In the first illustration, a slave of the king is delivered from his slavery by joining the sangha. When the Buddha asks him if the king would demand his return, the king protests that instead he would worship him. *These are the words of a devout man.* So devout is Ajatasattu that, when he departs, the Buddha says to the sangha, "the King is done for, his fate is sealed, monks. But *if the king had not deprived his father that good man and just king of his life, then, as he sat here the pure and spotless Dhamma-eye would have arisen in him*"[41] (italics added). Here we see the principles that bad karma can inhibit realization, and that the Dharma Eye arises in response to knowledge.

The king is eager to hear more. The Buddha goes on to cite the fruits of the homeless life that follow:

1. Freedom from servitude (¶36);
2. Solitude (¶38);
3. Joy of dispassion (first meditative attainment) (¶76);
4. Joy of concentration (second meditative attainment) (¶78);

[41] D 2.102.

5. Joy devoid of delight (third meditative attainment) (¶80);
6. Mental purity and clarification (fourth meditative attainment) (¶82);
7. Perfection of insight (¶84);
8. Production of a mind-made body (¶86);
9. Visionary experiences (¶88);
10. Clairaudience (¶90);
11. Telepathy (¶92);
12. Recollection of past lives (¶94);
13. The Divine Eye (whereby one perceives the karma of others) (¶96);
14. Perfect awareness and full awakening (¶98).

After the fruit of solitude, the king asks the Buddha if he can name another fruit of the homeless life. The Buddha describes the coming of a tathagata, arhant as well as a buddha, fully enlightened, endowed with wisdom (*dhamma*) and morality (*sila,* 'conduct'), one who follows the path and knows the worlds, trains people who are capable of training, and teaches devas and people. This is the stock description of the spiritual attainments of a tathagata. He is self-ordained, possessed of superknowledge, and proclaims the world with its devas, *maras* ('harmful spirits'), brahmas, princes, and people—presumably a reference to his understanding of metaphysics, ontology, and cosmology.

The householder, hearing the Tathagata, believes him, and resolves to become homeless to acquire merit. In this state, he cultivates morality, restraint, and contentment, followed by reflective and clear awareness, and he rejoices and becomes glad, freed from the five hindrances, obstructions, fetters, or obstacles of sensory desire, anger, sloth-torpor, restlessness-worry, and doubt. He is like one freed from debt, sickness, bonds, slavery, or the perils of the desert. This leads to the realization of the first meditative attainment, the third fruit of the homeless life.

The Samannaphala Sutta presents a comprehensive overview of the whole Buddhist path, and is widely regarded as a masterpiece of the Pali Canon.

In his description of the path, the Buddha repeatedly emphasizes the body: "just as a skilled bathman or his assistant, kneading the soap powder which he has sprinkled with water, forms from it, in a metal dish, a soft lump, so that the ball of soap powder becomes one oleaginous mass, bound with oil so that nothing escapes—so this monk suffuses, drenches, fills and irradiates his body so that no spot remains untouched."[42] The sensuality of the description is striking. Sarah Shaw, in her anthology of Pali meditation texts, writes,

> One of the distinguishing features of the Buddha's system of meditation is the emphasis placed upon the physical body both as a foundation for practice and as the means of experiencing and exploring reality.... Because there is also a mixture of painful and happy experience, the human bodily form is considered the most suitable for spiritual development. ...the suttas of the Pali canon do not dismiss bodily and sensory experiences as illusion, or a delusion, or sensory experience as in itself negative or debilitating. ...The comprehensiveness of the practice, and its applicability to so many diverse areas of life is, I think, also peculiarly Buddhist. Buddhaghosa says that as a meditation subject it is only taught in the dispensation of a Buddha.[43]

Such a distinctive emphasis, which Buddhaghosa and others note, is surely key to grasping the dharma, suggestive of cognate practices such as *hatha* yoga, kundalini yoga, Chöd, Qigong, etc., based on a hypothesized psychophysical energy variously referred to as tapas (kundalini), *tumo,* qi, etc. in the Hindu, Tibetan, and Chinese traditions respectively, in addition to many others, including shamanism. Thus, there is something singularly significant about the *body* in the context of spiritual development in the Buddhist world-view.

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[42] D 2.76.

[43] *Buddhist Meditation,* pp. 140–142. See also p. 217, n. 20 and Visuddhimagga, 8.42.

The second fruit answers the king's question, but the Buddha elaborates twelve more fruits of the homeless life, seguing into a spiritual teaching, as was his wont. The first two pertain to the outer, bodily life. The next five (#3–7) pertain to the cultivation of the mind and the path of meditation based on the meditative attainments.

Jhana is another of those words for which no completely satisfactory translation exists. It is cognate with Sanskrit *dhyana,* root DHI, 'to shine' or 'perceive.' The PED says it "never means vaguely meditation. It is the technical term for a special religious experience, reached in a certain order of mental states." The PED goes on to itemize these states:

> 1. The mystic, with his mind free from sensuous and worldly ideas, concentrates his thoughts on some special subject (for instance, the impermanence of all things). This he thinks out by attention to the facts, and by reasoning. 2. Then uplifted above attention & reasoning, he experiences joy & ease both of body and mind. 3. Then the bliss passes away, & he becomes suffused with a sense of ease, and 4. he becomes aware of pure lucidity of mind & equanimity of heart. The whole really forms one series of mental states....The state of mind left after the experience of the four jhanas is described as follows...'with his heart thus serene, made pure, translucent, cultured, void of evil, supple, ready to act, firm and imperturbable.' It will be seen that there is no suggestion of trance, but rather of an enhanced vitality. In the descriptions of the crises in the religious experiences of the Christian saints and mystics, expressions similar to those used in the jhanas are frequent....Laymen could pass through the four jhanas....The jhanas are only a means, not the end.[44]

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[44] S.v. Jhana. Cf. Timothy Leary's and Robert Anton Wilson's eight-circuit model of consciousness, especially Circuit V: the Neurosomatic Circuit, Circuit VI: the Neuroelectric or Metaprogrammng Circuit, Circuit VII: the Neurogenic or Morphogenic Circuit, and Circuit VIII: the Psychoatomic or Quantum Nonlocal Circuit (Overmind), characterized by rapture, reflexivity, past-life recall, and nonlocal awareness (illumination) respectively. See their "The Eightfold Model of Human Intelligence."

The seventh fruit, Perfection of Insight, is the imperturbable perfection of metaphysical understanding stemming from complete freedom from all impurities and hindrances to true seeing. This is a transitional element to the next group of six (#8–13), which can only be referred to as "magical," or perhaps "psychic," including clairaudience, telepathy, past-life recall, and the Divine Eye (*dibbacakkhu*).

The psychic powers, so-called, including multi-corporeality, invisibility, the ability to pass through matter, levitation, travelling in a mental body, as well as what can only be described as cosmological or astronomical visions, suggest psychedelic visionary experiences. Interestingly, these are also typical characteristics of the UFO phenomenon.[45]

The Divine Eye may be interpreted as the intense realization of the truth of karma, whereby one actually perceives and experiences it as real, but it may also be taken as a psychic power in which one perceives the karmas of others. It is also transitional, leading to the final and singular fruit—the attainment of a tathagata, awakening itself. This list of fruits is an alternative twelvefold model of the path of the monastic life, leading from ordination to the attainment of a tathagata. This last item is uniquely Buddhist.

Consider the symbolism used by the Buddha in connection with the third meditative attainment, the "joy devoid of delight" or happiness that is the fifth fruit of the homeless life. The Buddha says, "Just as if, in a pond of blue, red or white lotuses in which the flowers, born in the water, grown in the water, not growing out of the water, are fed from the water's depths, those blue, red or white lotuses would be suffused...with the cool water—so with this joy

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[45] For a critical review of this topic from an objective historical perspective by the foremost expert in the field, see Vallée, *Passport to Magonia*. Evans Wentz's *Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries* is also suggestive. UFO phenomena are also described in the ancient Vedic literature, including the Mahabharata (4th cent. BCE–4th cent. CE) and the Puranas (3rd–10th centuries CE). These works probably incorporate significantly older oral traditions.

devoid of delight the monk so suffuses his body that no spot remains untouched."[46]

The occasion of the sutta is the *uposatha* of Komudi, the water lily or sacred lotus. The lotus is one of the eight auspicious symbols of Buddhism. The BuddhaNet website says, "lotuses are symbols of purity and 'spontaneous' generation and hence symbolize divine birth. According to the Lalitavistara, 'the spirit of the best of men is spotless, like the new lotus in the [muddy] water which does not adhere to it,' and, according to esoteric Buddhism, the heart of the beings is like an unopened lotus: when the virtues of the Buddha develop therein the lotus blossoms. This is why the Buddha sits on a lotus in bloom. In Tantrism, it is the symbol of the feminine principle."[47] The Buddha refers to the female principle in the famous earth-touching gesture, in which he calls upon the deva of the earth to bear witness to the fact of his attainment, thereby overcoming Mara (lit. 'causing death').

The seed or root of the lotus is the mud of samsara, a remarkable fact in that the lotus is the archetypal symbol of enlightenment itself. *This suggests that samsara has a function in the scheme of reality*. Since reality is all, and includes all, it must also include samsara; even if samsara is illusory, it is still experienced. Therefore, it is part of the system. The lotus root binds us to samsara, but it is also the source of enlightenment, and it must be drawn on for sustenance before it can be cut. Nevertheless, the lotus does not rise above the level of the water; it is at the intersection of the two polarities of soma and psyche, water/mud and sun/light. In this respect, the lotus is more like the bodhisattva, who experiences enlightenment in the world, than the arhant, who seeks to transcend the world as soon as possible by cutting the root that binds them to the mud. If the lotus is identified with the crown of the head, then the lotus itself is brain-mind and the root of the lotus is the spine.

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[46] D 2.80.

[47] Buddha Dharma Education Association (BuddhaNet), "The Symbol of the Lotus."

Discourse to Ambattha

Digha Nikaya 3

Country: Kosala
Locale: Icchanankala
Speakers: Pokkharasati, Ambattha, the Buddha

Icchanankala is a monarchy. Northwest of Magadha, Kosala corresponds to modern Awadh in Uttar Pradesh in northeast India. Kosala was a great power, but was weakened by a series of wars with Magadha, which annexed Kosala in the fourth century BCE, after the Buddha's passing. Kosala dominated and eventually destroyed the Buddha's home country of Shakya, for which reason the Buddha is sometimes referred to as a Kosalan. King Pasenadi of Kosala is a lay follower of the Buddha who built many monasteries. He is eventually overthrown by a palace coup while visiting the Buddha and dies of exposure outside the capital city of Magadha while trying to get help from his powerful neighbour.

Icchanankala is a sacred centre of the Brahmans, who gather here twice a year to recite the Vedas and discuss their interpretations of the meanings of the scriptures. Icchanankala is near Ukkattha, the territory of the Brahman Pokkharasati, to whom the king made a gift of the town. This kind of political arrangement is frequently mentioned in the Pali Canon, and was common at the time.

The Buddha is living in the dense woods outside of Icchanankala, a rich agricultural area, when Pokkharasati hears of him, so he sends his pupil, Ambattha, to test the Buddha. Ambattha is a young

student of the Vedas who knows the mantras; expounds the rules, rituals, lore of sounds and meanings, oral tradition, philosophy, and physiognomy; and is regarded by his teacher as fully accomplished. The test is to evaluate the marks of a great man.

One of the more curious traditions of India, fully accepted and recited in the Pali Canon, is the marks of a great or superior man. These bodily signs are supposed to be able to be observed and were observed on the body of Gotama when he was born.[48] They are irrespective of age. As Pokkharasati says, a man with the marks is destined to become either a "wheel turning righteous monarch of the law," if he remains a householder or, if he renounces the household life, he will become a fully enlightened Buddha "who draws back the veil from the world."[49]

There are thirty-two major marks and eighty minor marks of a great man. In Buddhism, thirty-two is also the number of the parts of the body. In Cabala, it is the number of the "paths of wisdom," which together describe the structure of reality, both macrocosmic and microcosmic.[50] In the Mahayana tradition, these signs describe the Buddha's subtle energy body, the *samboghakaya,* not the physical form or *nirmanakaya.* Though often much is made of the incongruity of the marks with physical facts, most of them are not hard to visualize. The thirty-two major marks (*mahapursha lakshana*) include flat feet; long, slender fingers; pliant hands and feet;

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[48] "They are in part adaptations to a man of poetical epithets applied to the sun, or to the personification of the mystic human sacrifice; partly characteristics of personal beauty such as any man might have; and one or two of them—the little wart, for instance, between the eyes with white hair on it, and the protuberance at the top of the head—may possibly be added in reminiscence of personal bodily peculiarities which Gotama actually had." T.W. Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha,* Vol. 2, p. 131.

[49] D 3.1.5.

[50] It is also half the number of codons in the genetic code, which is similar among all organisms and can be expressed in a simple table of sixty-four cells.

finely webbed toes and fingers;[51] full-sized heels with arched insteps; thighs like a royal stag; long arms; a penile sheath or foreskin; dark, curly hair; a clear, golden hued complexion; soft, smooth skin; rounded soles, palms, shoulders, and crown of the head; a leonine torso; upright and erect; full, round shoulders; white, even, closely spaced teeth; leonine jaw; ample saliva; long and broad tongue; deep and resonant voice; dark brown or deep blue eyes; long eyelashes; a tuft of white or grey hair between the eyebrows; and a topknot or other protuberance at the top of the head.

A few of the marks cannot be explained naturalistically. These include a thousand-spoked wheel sign on the feet, a ten-foot aura, and forty teeth.

Mostly this list summarizes the ideal qualities of a male based on the best possible karma according to the Indian aesthetics of the Buddha's time. In other words, the Buddha's body conforms to the contemporary Indian standard of male beauty. According to the classical description, the Buddha has a long, beautiful face and ears; large, rounded forehead; arched eyebrows; soft, smooth, golden skin; blue eyes; dark curly hair, long eyelashes, with a mole between his eyebrows; fine body hair; a rounded, large, or protuberant cranium; and a strong nose. The eighty minor marks give additional details regarding the hands, feet, gait, torso, skin, body, strength, head, hair, breath, etc. in much the same vein. The Law of Karma dictates that the being ready to be reborn (the *gandhabba)* takes on a body with the characteristics corresponding to their karma. Today we would say that they have "good genes." Thus, Buddhism supports the idea that some people are better born than others, but this is less impressive than it sounds when one realizes that everyone is a stew of good and bad karma. In fact, a good birth may exhaust one's good karma and thus expose one to the risk of a bad rebirth if one does not augment one's merit in the current life. We

[51] Extreme forms of this are a recognized medical disorder called syndactyly, but there is no need to suppose that the Buddha's hands and feet were malformed since the Buddha is generally described as handsome.

are essentially free in terms of our volition, and it is intention that generates karma. Therefore, the fact of a good rebirth is less karmically significant than one might think, certainly far less significant than in Hinduism, where caste is a life-long possession and the differences between the castes are strongly emphasized. The Buddha, on the other hand, admits all castes to the sangha and recognizes all people as a single family, for which he was severely criticized by the establishment of his time.

Therefore, Ambattha, with all the pride and arrogance of youth, goes to look at the Buddha. We are told that Ambattha travels by carriage with an entourage of young men, then dismounts and walks into the dense jungle where the Buddha is living.

Arriving at the clearing, Ambattha finds some monastics walking up and down in the open air, perhaps practising the Buddhist walking meditation.[52] The monastics, thinking that the Buddha might enjoy conversing with "such a young man," direct him to the Buddha's hut, the door of which is closed and latched. The Buddha is taking his customary nap, lying on his right side, as was his wont, or he might have been meditating. Therefore, Ambattha is instructed to go quietly to the door, cough, and knock on the bolt, which he does. The Buddha answers the door, and Ambattha enters along with his retinue of young men.

His friends sit down politely, but Ambattha paces up and down before the Buddha, who is seated, and utters some conventional but insincere words of politeness. The Buddha is not impressed, and rebukes him with the words, "Well now, Ambattha, would you behave like this if you were talking to venerable and learned Brahmins, teachers of teachers, as you do with me, walking and standing as I am sitting, and uttering vague words of politeness?" Not one to be rebuked, Ambattha, replies, "No, Reverend Gotama. A Brahmin should…sit with a sitting Brahmin… . But as for those shaven little ascetics, menials, black scourings from Brahma's foot, with them it

[52] See A 5.3.29(9).

is fitting to speak just as I do with the Reverend Gotama."[53] The Buddha is not popular with everyone! However, the Buddha does not take the bait. Rather, he says, "Ambattha, you came here seeking something. Whatever it was you came for, you should listen attentively to hear about it. Ambattha, you have not perfected your training. Your conceit of being trained is due to nothing but inexperience." [54] The Buddha's comment infuriates Ambattha, who curses and insults the Buddha. Ambattha's interest in physiognomy seems to be related to racism, for he next attacks the Shakyans, the Buddha's clan, as fierce, rough spoken, touchy, violent, and menial, and he complains that they do not respect Brahmans. This last comment is a reference to the fact that the caste system had not taken root in Shakya, which had not assimilated western Brahmanic superiority.[55]

The Buddha recognizes that the Shakyans have offended Ambattha, so he asks him what that was. Apparently, while on a trip to Kapilavastu on some business for Pokkharasati, he went to the meeting hall of the Shakyans and, rather than honouring him and offering him a seat as he had expected, it seemed to Ambattha that they were mocking him, and he formed the grudge that Shakyans do not honour Brahmans, which may also be rooted in historical fact. The Buddha suggests to Ambattha that he is overreacting and that the Shakyans can do what they want in their own meeting hall. Ambattha reminds the Buddha that the Brahmans are innately superior, a fact not established in Shakya. Clearly, this is the crux of the issue, so the Buddha decides to turn the tables by asking about Ambattha's own family lineage, which, as he tells the Buddha, is Kanhayan.

The Buddha points out that the Kanhayans were subject to the Shakyans in the past and that Ambattha is descended from King

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[53] D 3.1.10.

[54] Ibid, 3.1.11.

[55] According to some authorities, the Shakyans were either pure or mixed race Mongoloids. See Allen, *The Buddha and Dr. Führer,* p. 1.

Okkaka, as are the Shakyans, but through a slave girl named Disa, who had a black child, named Kanha ('black'), by the king. Hence the name of his family. The name of the Shakyans, on the other hand, means, 'strong as teak' (*saka*). The Shakyans descend from the four elder legitimate sons of King Okkaka, who intermarried with their sisters to maintain the blood purity of the Shakyan line. In this way, the Buddha shows Ambattha that his birth is inferior to the Buddha's, based on Ambattha's own way of thinking. This is an excellent example of how the Buddha uses common ground as a basis for converting his audience.

At this stage, Ambattha's friends erupt in anger, entreating the Buddha to honour Ambattha as his equal, for he is wellborn. However, the Buddha tells the young men to allow Ambattha to speak if he is superior or, if he is inferior, as the Buddha has suggested, then they can speak for him, the implication clearly being that, because they spoke, Ambattha is in fact inferior. Intimidated, the young men shut up. When pressured by the Buddha, Ambattha acknowledges that Dasi, the king's slave, is in fact his ancestor, at which his friends exclaim in shock that he *is* ill born.

Mission accomplished, the Buddha now defends Ambattha to his friends, pointing out that Kanha became a great and powerful rishi in the south, where he learned the mantras.[56] He asks King Okakka for the hand of his daughter, Maddarupi, but the king is outraged by the request, which he considers impertinent. Kanha, now revealed as a powerful sorcerer (similar to the story of Milarepa), curses the land, and the king relents, allowing him to marry his daughter. This story also shows that any theories of race superiority are completely alien to the Buddha's thinking, who clearly uses these arguments to ambush Ambattha, not because he believes in

[56] This is the first of many references to the Power of Truth and the efficacy of mantras. Mantrayana (Vajrayana or Tantra) develops based on these premises. See, for example, the Atanatiya Sutta (D 32), Angulimala Sutta (M 86), Gilana Sutta (S 46), and the Ratana, Candima, and Suriya Suttas (K 5.2.1, 2.9, and 2.10 respectively). The Sinhala *Pirit Potha* compiles twenty-four or twenty-nine protective discourses from the Pali Canon for use in the home.

them. This is an important point to recognize, because of the abuse of Buddhist ideas by right-wing ideologues like Rene Guenon, Julius Evola, Savitri Devi, and others, who are more allied with Hindu race and caste theories than with Buddhism.

The Buddha concludes by quoting the Brahma Sanankumara (Pali; Skt. *Sanat Kumara,* lit. 'eternal youth'), who appears in sutta 18 as an advocate for the Buddha: "The Khattiya's best among those who value clan; / He with knowledge and conduct is best of gods and men."[57] The Buddha declares that this is his view also.[58]

Sanat Kumara is one of the Four Kumaras, four sages or rishis who wander the universe together as divine children. They are the first mind-born creations and sons of Brahma. Contrary to Brahma's wishes, they are celibate (*brahmacharya*) teachers. They are also listed among twelve great devotees (*mahajanas*) of bhakti, and are associated with Krishna and sometimes with Shiva. Sanat Kumara, along with his three brothers, named Sanaka, Sanatana, and Sanandana, is mentioned in the Mahabharata as one of the seven sages, the transmitters of the Veda. The *Sanatkumara Samhita* is attributed to him. He is also a yoga preceptor and an advocate of the religion of inward contemplation (*nivritti*), referred to in the Bhagavad Gita. In addition to advocating Buddhism, he is associated with Samkhya philosophy. Interestingly in this context, the Mahabharata represents Sanat Kumara as proposing a classification of beings from lowest to highest based on their colour, from black, brown, to red, yellow, and white.[59] A living entity proceeds through the "colours" in his journey in order from black to white,

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[57] D 3.1.28.

[58] "Hofrath Bühler has pointed out that in the Mahâbhârata III, 185 (Bombay edition) there is an interesting passage where Sanat-kumara (the Sanskrit form of the name Sanan-kumara) is actually represented by the Brahmans themselves as having uttered, as referee in a dispute on a point similar to the one here discussed, not indeed the actual words here imputed to him, but others of a very similar import. See the whole article in the J. R. A. S., 1897, pp. 585–588." Rhys Davids, op. cit., p. 121.

[59] A blue or "sky" race is also referred to, ranked between brown and red.

whereupon he achieves liberation. The Buddha's reply to Ambattha sounds like a parody of Sanat Kumara.

Having annihilated Ambattha's arguments, Ambattha seems to be finally chastened and simply asks for the knowledge and conduct that makes one best in the spiritual realm. This is the turning point in the conversation. The Buddha says that knowledge and conduct are attained by the abandonment of all notions of racial and class superiority and inferiority. Rather, it is identical with the dharma of a tathagata. Referring to this dharma as the "unexcelled attainment," the Buddha observes that there are four ways that one can fail to achieve it, depending on how one's food is got: by windfalls, by digging tubers and roots, by tending the flame of a fire hearth at the edge of a village, and finally by building a guest house at a crossroads for those who have attained. The implication seems to be that a true spiritual aspirant does not gather food for himself, not even windfalls, referring presumably to the Buddhist practice of alms, since even arhants must eat. In other words, one must offer one's body as an opportunity for others to earn merit as an act of compassion (an alternate interpretation might be that one must make no effort toward the gathering of food, but if it is about effort why are windfalls less meritorious than alms gathering?).

The Buddha declares that since neither Pokkharasati nor Ambattha do this, they are incapable of attaining the unexcelled knowledge and conduct and that their claims to superiority are belied. The Buddha denigrates Pokkharasati and Ambattha as mere memorizers of sacred texts, "yet you do not thereby become a sage or one practised in the way of a sage—such a thing is not possible."[60] The implication is that the Tathagata's knowledge and conduct do meet this criterion; thus, the Buddha's dharma, which elsewhere he declares to be archaic and long forgotten, is *like the way of the Vedic rishis*. He asks Ambattha whether those ancient sages were addicted to the pleasures of the five senses, eating fine foods, amusing themselves with women, riding about in chariots, or

[60] D 3.2.10.

guarded by soldiers in cities, like themselves. Therefore, the Buddha concludes, neither Ambattha nor his teacher are sages nor trained in the ways of sages. They are charlatans, and as such are not entitled to the veneration they demand.

At this point, the Buddha gets up, goes outside and begins to walk up and down so that Ambattha can examine his body for the marks of a great man, which is his original purpose. All these are visible to Ambattha except for two: the penile sheath and large tongue. The Buddha obliges him by showing these to him as well! At this point, Ambattha, mission accomplished, withdraws.

Ambattha returns to the town and reports to Pokkharasati, waiting for him in a park with a group of Brahmans, that the Buddha has all the signs of a great man. Then he tells his teacher the whole story, at Pokkarasati's request. Pokkarasati is incensed that Ambattha has treated the Buddha so rudely, and is so angry that he kicks Ambattha, knocks him down, and wants to go to see the Buddha himself, but the Brahmans note that it is too late to go to see the Buddha that day, and advise him to go the next day. Instead, Pokkharasati goes home, directs that a meal be prepared, and then leaves for where the Buddha is, assisted by the light of torches, first by chariot, and then by foot.

Pokkharasati asks him about the conversation he had with Ambattha. He asks the Buddha to excuse the rudeness of his young and foolish student; the Buddha accepts Pokkharasati's apology. Confirming the marks of a great man for himself, Pokkharasati invites the Buddha to come to his home for his morning meal. By this time, the text implies, it is well past midnight, so the Buddha takes his robe and bowl and the entire order travels back to Pokkharasati's house for the morning meal. Since there is no suggestion of sleeping, it seems that Pokkharasati and the Buddha spend the early morning hours talking together.

After satisfying their hunger, the Buddha gives a "graduated discourse" followed by a sermon on the "dharma in brief." The graduated discourse is intended to lead to a dharma talk proper, which is given when the hearer is ready, indicated by pliancy of mind, freedom from the hindrances, joy, and calm. Graduated talks concern

general matters pertaining more to the household than to the monastic life, including the virtue of generosity, morality, heaven, sense-desires, and the value of renunciation—matters that we might call "religious." The dharma talk in brief often precedes a hearer's (*savaka's*) going forth, sometimes accompanied by their spontaneous awakening. In this sutta, the dharma talk in brief corresponds to a sermon on the Four Noble Truths, but it can be about any topic. As the Buddha speaks, the "dharma-eye" spontaneously opens in Pokkharasati, accompanied by the intense realization that all samsaric things are transient (*anicca*). Pokkharasati becomes a lay follower of the Buddha.

Discourse to Sonadanda

Digha Nikaya 4

Country: Anga
Locale: Gaggara's lotus pond in Campa
Speakers: Sonadanda, the Buddha

This sutta is spoken at Gaggara's Lotus Pond, Campa, in the land of the Angas, a kingdom that, like Kosala, is destined to be annexed by Magadha. The Angas are a mixed-race people, in the southeast part of the land occupied by the *mahajanapadas,* the 'sixteen great states.' Historically, the Angas were looked down upon as a barbarous people who had annexed part of Magadha in the past. Bimbisara, the Magadhan king, who became a great friend and patron of the Buddha, killed Brahmadatta, the last independent king of Anga, and seized Campa. Bimbisara made it his headquarters and ruled over it as his father's viceroy. The boundary between Magadha and Anga to the east can be seen in the Chanpan River today. The capital, Campa, was located at the juncture of the Ganges and the Chanpan River. Campa was a great centre of trade noted for its wealth and commerce. A port city, merchants sailed from there to Suvarnabhumi**.** The location of Suvarnabhumi is uncertain. Some identify it with southern India, perhaps Sri Lanka, whereas others associate it with Southeast Asia, near Java. The kingdom of Campa in present day Vietnam is traditionally thought to descend from Campa, but anthropologists believe its people came from Borneo.

The Brahman Sonadanda essentially owns the town, having been given it, a prosperous and populous place, by Bimbisara. One afternoon, Sonadanda goes to the roof of his residence for a nap, only to see the streets fill with throngs of people, all going to see the Buddha. The Brahman tells his steward to ask the crowd to wait. The rumour of his intention to visit the Buddha reaches a group of Brahman visitors who have gathered in Campa to conduct some business, and they visit Sonadanda to confirm that he intends to visit the Buddha. The conservative Brahmans think that Sonadanda is lowering himself by going to visit the Buddha, whereas the Buddha should visit him instead, warning him that his reputation might be damaged by such a venture. In the list of the good qualities of Sonadanda that the Brahmans recite at great length, physical beauty is mentioned as one of the attributes of a great man, indicative of his good karma. The text also states that Gotama has "*newly* gone forth as a wanderer"[61] (italics added), suggesting that this sutta is relatively early. In addition, the Brahman Pokkharasati, who we encountered in the previous sutta as an older Brahman who becomes a lay follower of the Buddha, is a friend of Sonadanda.

Sonadanda retorts that since Bimbisara and Pokkharasati honour the Buddha, as well as King Pasenadi of Kosala, and the rule of hospitality obliges him, he will visit the Buddha, citing in rebuttal all the Buddha's good qualities, and finally declaring that the Buddha is "beyond all praise."[62]

Sonadanda's list of the good qualities of the Buddha includes the interesting statement that "the ascetic Gotama, while youthful, a black-haired youth, in the prime of his young days, *in the first stage of life* went forth from the household life into homelessness"[63] (italics added). This reference to "the first stage of life" alludes to the Vedic theory of four life stages, the first of which is 'studentship' (*brahmacharya*). The original *dharmastras* (first millennium BCE?)

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[61] D 4.5.
[62] D 4.6.
[63] Ibid.

identified four *ashramas* (usually translated as 'stages of life') consisting of studentship, householdership, retirement, and renunciation, which were subsequently identified with specific ages.[64] The emphasis on youth and the reference to the colour of the Buddha's hair clearly implies that his young age is being referred to (Rhys Davids has "the beauty of his early manhood").[65] Studentship was especially associated with adolescence. The *ashrama* theory may be the basis on which Nichiren states that the Buddha left home at the age of 19, whereas the mainline view is that the Buddha left home at the age of 29 (note the exact difference of ten years). However, the Buddha requires that a monastic be at least 20 (from conception) to be considered for ordination. According to this Northern Buddhist view, the Buddha attained enlightenment after eleven years, at the age of 30, and taught for fifty years. An eleven-year interval seems to fit the events between the renunciation and the enlightenment better too.[66]

However, the householder stage begins with marriage. Since Gotama had already married at 16, he was technically already a householder, and was certainly in the second stage of life by the age of 29. The *Buddhacarita,* a non-canonical early second century CE biography of the Buddha that draws on traditional sources, implies that his son Rahula was not a newborn, as the stock story says, but an infant.[67] The *Buddhacarita* also implies that Gotama renounced during "the first stage of life." This passage says that Gotama leaves

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[64] See Olivelle, *Asrama System,* passim.

[65] T.W. Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha,* Vol. 1, p. 148 (D 4.6).

[66] According to the suttas, the Buddha studies meditation under Alara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputta, mastering each system, one after the other; meditates alone in the forest, mastering fear; and practises asceticism for six years, starving himself to the threshold of dying. He then gives up asceticism, nurtures himself back to health, and practises the meditation that he spontaneously discovered as a child under the bodhi tree, and soon awakens. It seems hard to cram all these experiences into six years, whereas eleven years seems exactly right.

[67] Op. cit., 8.67f., in Cowell, *Buddhist Mahayana Texts,* p. 88.

"his grieving parents with tear-stained faces," [68] which makes more sense than the stock story.

Another interesting detail that might be easily overlooked is the reference to the Buddha being a teacher of devas and people. We saw this detail in the description of a tathagata in sutta 1. Sonadanda says that "many thousands of devas have taken refuge with him."[69] This number is much larger than the number of monastics, which is usually given as 1,250. Thus, the Buddha was more popular in the deva worlds than in the human world! As I said, "gods" is a very poor translation of devas. "Shining" or "luminous beings" is the literally correct translation. These are real, advanced spiritual beings with greater knowledge, beauty, longevity, and power than humans, who occupy higher dimensions of reality than humans, but the lower orders of devas take an interest in and interact with us, especially with superior people like the Buddha.

Sonadanda also says, "Whenever he stays in any town or village, that place is not troubled by non-human beings."[70] This implies that the Buddha has a spiritual power about him, a charisma or "numen" perhaps similar in quality to the Power of Truth, that repels negative beings and forces, referring presumably to asuras ('anti-gods'), ghosts, and hell-beings, as well as the social fact of the experience of such trouble, similar to the possessing demons that Jesus encountered and that Laozi alludes to. This kind of psychosomatic (or "psychoid") trouble seems to be a common feature of ancient humanity, and even today we frequently find people possessed by a wide variety of "bad spirits." We are beginning to see in these and similar references an adumbration of Tantra.[71]

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[68] Ibid. Cf. *Buddhacarita,* 2.46 et seq.

[69] D 4.6.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Tantra is difficult to define but easy to recognize. Conventionally asserted to have arisen in India as early as the fifth century of the common era, its core elements penetrate deep into Indian antiquity. The word is first used in the Rigveda. Tantric concepts include the use of esoteric language and secrecy, importance of the guru, tantric vows, reevaluation of the status and role of women, ritual use of

The Buddha is also "consulted by the chief of the various leaders of sects,"[72] emphasizing his universality and the non-exclusive, non-sectarian character of his dharma. Apparently convinced, the Brahmans agree to go with Sonadanda to the lotus pool.

As Sonadanda approaches and sits next to the Buddha, he is filled with fear, thinking that his reputation and therefore his income might be negatively affected if he embarrasses himself in conversation with the Buddha.[73]

The Buddha, sensing his anxiety, asks Sonadanda to define a Brahman. Sonadanda breathes a sigh of relief. An easy question. Sonadanda answers by reciting the five qualities of a Brahman, according to the Vedic tradition:

1. Racial (caste) purity documented to seven generations;

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mandalas, analogical thinking, reevaluation of negative mental states, sexual yoga, and antinomian acts and foul offerings (Williams and Tribe, cited in Peter Harvey, *Introduction to Buddhism,* pp. 190f). Many tantric techniques are described or alluded to in the Pali Canon, including initiatory transmission, breathing techniques, posture, mantra, spontaneous poetry, visualization, sacrifice, revaluing the body, acts of self-purification or renunciation, devotion to the teacher, pilgrimage, vows or rules, supernormal powers, dharma feasts, visionary experiences including dreams, and spiritual energy or power. The Buddha claims to be restoring the Vedic tradition to its original perfect state, associated with the rishis, which included the ritual imbibition of soma, a mind-altering entheogen. All these concepts are expressed in the Pali Canon, to which I ascribe the term "proto-tantric" to distinguish them from the later literary tradition that established itself primarily in Tibet as Vajrayana, a sub-school of the Mahayana. We also find a proto-tantric school in the Theravada, called Yogavacara. Kate Crosby notes that Yogavacara represents the oldest living meditation tradition in the Theravada world. We will find numerous references to these concepts in the pages that follow (see in particular D 3, 6, 9, 11, 16, 18, 22, 24, 25, 26, and 32).

[72] Rhys Davids has "is the acknowledged chief of all the founders of sects." See *Dialogues of the Buddha,* Vol. 1, p. 149.

[73] The conspiracy theorist in me would like to see the repetitive reference to "reputation," originally put in Sonadanda's mind by a group of Brahman businessmen who are visiting the city, as a planned attempt to discredit the Buddha based on the threat that they might not do further business there. It is certainly true that the Buddha was not popular everywhere, and there was at least one attempt against his life.

2. Knowledge of the mantras;
3. Appearance;
4. **Virtue**; and
5. **Wisdom.**

The Buddha asks Sonadanda, "If one of these five qualities were omitted, could not one be recognized as a true Brahman, being possessed of one of these qualities?"[74] Sonadanda admits that appearance is relatively unimportant and might be ignored. The Buddha presses Sonadanda whether anything else may be left out. Sonadanda concedes that mantras might be left out, for after appearance they are relatively unimportant (a surprising statement for a Brahman to make). The Buddha presses further, and Sonadanda admits that birth could be left out, for what is birth compared to virtue? Thus, wisdom and virtue are the two mutually irreducible qualities of a true Brahman. Thus, Sonadanda says, "wisdom is purified by morality, and morality by wisdom."[75] He identifies this combination with the highest good, and the Buddha concurs.

In this text, wisdom consists of the meditative attainments, the insights (body-consciousness, mental body, psychic powers, remembering past lives, and the Law of Karma, which together make up the Divine Eye), and the cessation of the corruptions or taints (*asavas,* consisting of sensuality, clinging to rebirth, wrong view, and ignorance). Virtue consists of harmlessness, including not harming others using sex; not taking what is not given (stealing); not telling lies or gossiping; and avoiding drunkenness.

Ultimate concepts in the Buddhist philosophical system are often expressed in terms of codetermining dyads. Here we see wisdom and morality as the two mutually purifying aspects of the highest good. In the chain of cause and effect (*paticcasamuppada, nidana*) the *namarupa* conjoins the opposites of mind and matter, within which the mutually irreducible codetermination of sankhara

[74] D 4.14.
[75] D 4.21.

and *vinnana* ('consciousness')[76] is concealed. Samsara is divided between nirvana and samsara, the formless and form worlds, and the world of neither perception nor non-perception. Samsara exists in relation to reality, the supermundane. Similarly, karma conceals a dyad of cause and effect within it, simultaneously dual, singular, and empty, depending on one's point of view. The Buddha's knowledge is "superknowledge," i.e., knowledge (gnosis) that is beyond merely rational knowing, which is constrained by objectification and duality. Superknowledge is non-local and trans-dual mind. It is inherently logical and intuitive, analytic and synthetic, experiential and objective, metaphysical and natural.

Thus, the highest good is resolved into a supreme dyad, as in the twelvefold chain of cause and effect, mind and matter. The name that the Buddha gave at the end of his life to his philosophy, the *dharma-vinaya* (not "Buddhism"), is also dyadic. Wisdom precedes virtue, because it is from wisdom that virtue flows, as the te from the tao, as ethics from metaphysics. Wisdom (gnosis) is the essentially salvific principle in the Pali Canon, despite the presence of another interpretation of the dharma that emphasizes renunciation and seems to compete with the wisdom interpretation to some extent.

The other Brahmans vociferously declare that appearance, mantras, and birth should *not* be disregarded, finally revealing their true bias. Sonadanda defends the Buddha's view, stating that appearance, mantras, and birth count as nothing without wisdom and virtue, yet he also states that he does not "decry appearance, mantras, or birth,"[77] i.e., he does not deny their karmic value or significance.

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[76] The English word is the same root as "science," plus "with," and refers to the knowing that knows itself as knowing (PIE *SKEI-, 'to cut, split.'). The PED identifies *vinnana* with Vedic *jna* 'cognition,' associated with individuality, life-force, mind and matter, regenerative force, mind as transmigrant, and sensory and perceptive activity.

[77] D 4.19.

Sonadanda takes refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, but his vacillating character returns, and he again frets over what others might think of him. He worries again about his reputation and income. The Buddha gives him a dharma talk, and he goes away converted, but without any of the special realizations or insights that result in other suttas from hearing the Buddha's discourse.

Discourse to Kutadanta

Digha Nikaya 5

Country: Magadha
Locale: Ambalatthika park in Khanumata
Speakers: Kutadanta, the Buddha

Walshe points out that this is not the same place as the royal park of Ambalatthika on the road between Rajagaha and Nalanda in the first sutta, but a place like it. Khanumata is described as populous, full of grass, timber, water, and corn. King Bimbisara of Magadha—who was murdered by his son, Ajatasattu, thus establishing this sutta as earlier than the second sutta of the Digha Nikaya—has given Khanumata to the Brahman Kutadanta.

Kutadanta decides to make a great sacrifice of bulls, bullocks, heifers, he-goats, and rams, seven hundred each, 3,500 animals in total, all tied to sacrificial posts. Walshe suggests that this is the story told by the Buddha to King Pasenadi of Kosala.[78]

As in the previous sutta, the governor goes up to his verandah for his mid-afternoon nap, clearly the norm at the time. Like Sonadanda, he sees the streets filled with people heading toward Ambalatthika. Asked the reason, his steward tells him that they are

[78] S 3.1.9.

going to see the Buddha. Perhaps this sutta was put after the previous one due to the similarity of the situation.

The absurdity of the story reveals itself, for it occurs to Kutadanta to ask the Buddha about how to conduct the threefold sacrifice with the sixteen requisites, a topic that Kutadanta, a Brahman, professes not to understand.

Ritual sacrifice is the heart of the Vedic religion. The Thai movie, *Angulimala,* shows the extent of the Vedic practice of animal sacrifice, which may be compared to the animal sacrifices of the ancient Hebrews.

The intent of the story is clearly to insult the Brahman, who is made out not to know his own business so that the Buddha is seen to be the true Brahman, but it is also to show that Buddhism is the true Brahmanism.

In the previous sutta, Sonadanda resolves to visit the Buddha, and is accompanied by a large group of Brahmans, to whom he praises the Buddha. Almost the same scenario occurs in this sutta.

One of the Buddha's teaching techniques, besides seeking common ground, is to tell a story set in the past, at the end of which the Buddha identifies people in or known to the audience as rebirths of the people in the story. Often the situation in the story reflects or embodies the current situation. Perhaps this became the basis for the belief that the Buddha possesses past-life recall, despite the Buddha's non-emphasis on psychic powers (the reality of which he never denies, however). The Buddha tells the Brahman the story of King Mahavijita ('great conqueror'), which is subsequently revealed to be a past-life memory of the Buddha himself.

Such stories indicate two beliefs regarding karma: (1) that people who are involved with each other in one life are likely to become involved with each other in similar ways in subsequent rebirths, and (2) that underlying patterns or structures of events reoccur from birth to birth, based on karma. Finally, the phenomenon of past-life recall itself, which is canonical, pervasive, and for which

empirical evidence exists,[79] raises the problem of the substrate in which these memories are preserved, as the brain is the substrate of biological memory but ceases to function at death. Clearly, the continuity of rebirth is also a continuity of memory, even if those memories are so subtle that they are ordinarily indiscernible to any but the most refined awareness.

The sutta is organized around the declaration of two issues where the Buddha is far ahead of his time: animal and human rights. This establishes the Buddha's fundamental political philosophy, and his ethical views regarding animal rights, as well as providing further insights into this concept of an "inner Brahmanism" that is opposed to the Brahmanism of rites, rituals, and dogmas. This doctrine further explains the ambivalent attitude that the Buddha seems to have toward Brahmans and Brahmanism, at times hostile and contemptuous, at other times collegial and cooperative.

Therefore, Mahavijita, like Kutadanta, wants to make a big Vedic sacrifice to produce merit, and approaches his *purohitam*, or 'family priest,' which Walshe translates as 'chaplain,' for instructions. Instead of answering him directly, the priest segues into a discussion of the state of the kingdom: "Your Majesty's country is beset by thieves, it is ravaged, villages and towns are being destroyed, and the countryside is infested with brigands. If your Majesty were to tax this region, that would be the wrong thing to do."[80] This reflects the social situation in northeast India at the Buddha's time. The land is dangerous; the monarchies and military dictatorships are ruthless; wealth is moving from the autocrats to the merchants, resulting in heavy taxation by the state; the laws are arbitrary and cruel; wars and political violence are common; brigands and gangs

[79] See Stevenson, *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation* and Tucker, *Return to Life,* for example.

[80] D 5.11.

haunt the roads; there is widespread dissatisfaction and widespread spiritual yearning.[81]

The chaplain continues,

> Suppose our Majesty were to think, 'I will get rid of this plague of robbers by execution and imprisonment, or by confiscation, threats and banishment,' the plague would not be properly ended. Those who survived would later harm Your Majesty's realm. However, with this plan you can completely eliminate the plague. To those in the kingdom who are engaged in cultivating crops and raising cattle, let Your Majesty distribute grain and fodder; to those in trade, give capital; to those in government service, assign proper living wages. Then those people, being intent in their own occupations, will not harm the kingdom. Your Majesty's revenues will be great, the land will be tranquil and not beset by thieves, and the people with joy in their hearts, will play with their children, and will dwell in open homes. (11)

In this remarkable passage, redolent of later political theories, the Buddha sets forth the basic thesis of classic social democratic economics, in which the state supports agriculture, capital, and a well-paid bureaucracy. In other words, the state is responsible for maintaining the common infrastructure, which in turn supports the civil society that depends on it, the prosperity of the latter resulting from the actions of the former making the taxes that the state spends to maintain the infrastructure affordable. Elsewhere, the Buddha envisages democratic government, and even kings abdicating their thrones and fortunes in favour of the people. The Buddha sees that a high tax, law-and-order agenda will intensify the cycle of violence, culminating in social breakdown. Ashoka put policies

[81] I am reminded, as I am frequently when reading the words of the Buddha, of the poems of Laozi regarding government, thieves, and taxes. For example,

"The people hunger because the rulers eat their taxes." (75)

"The vicious man taxes others." (79)

"He who tries to govern the state by cunning
Wrongs the state." (65)

like this in place during the third century BCE. Ashoka's benevolent public works included charitable hospitals, poverty relief, tree planting, travellers' inns, parks and gardens, wells and tanks, clinics for birds and animals, and a ban on animal sacrifice.

Having reformed his kingdom, Mahavijita reiterates his desire to perform a great sacrifice, so his chaplain gives him clearly allegorical instructions to perform the sacrifice. According to this allegory, the eight accessories for the sacrifice are the king's birth, beauty, wealth, power, generosity, knowledge of the mantras, linguistic skill, and his understanding of the workings of the Law of Karma. Similarly, the chaplain himself, being a Brahman, is wellborn, versed in the mantras, virtuous, and learned. The three modes of the sacrifice are not to regret the cost of the sacrifice in the past, present, or future. The ten conditions refer to ten precepts, starting with the familiar four precepts of pansil, followed by not coveting, not harbouring anger, and not having wrong views.[82]

Finally, the chaplain gives sixteen reasons why the sacrifice will be successful, including:

1. Inviting the kshatriya (Pali *khattiya*) caste to attend;
2. Including advisors, counsellors, Brahmans, and householders;
3. Being wellborn on both sides; and
4. His chaplain being wellborn.[83]

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[82] By my count this is seven items, but possibly the text includes calumny and harsh and frivolous speech as three modes of speech, making ten. The sutta makes these out to be sixteen: the four assenting groups, the eight endowments attributed to King Mahavijita, and the four endowments of the chaplain—altogether sixteen, in three modes.

[83] Again, the numbering seems very strange. By my count this is four items, unless the sixteen reasons include the ten conditions and we divide the advisors and counsellors, Brahmans and householders, into two, and being wellborn by two (for both sides of the family), in which case we get sixteen, but that seems very farfetched.

Finally, the chaplain points out that the sacrifice was carried out with ghee, oil, butter, curds, honey, and molasses; no animals are killed; no trees or plants are injured; and no slaves or servants are required to do anything against their will.

Kutadanta asks why this sacrifice is better.[84] The Buddha points out that arhants and stream entrants (*sotapanna,* less accurately translated as 'stream winner')[85]—those who have attained the arhant path—will not attend a violent sacrifice, but they will attend a sacrifice that does not involve killing, thus implicitly producing merit for the "sacrifice" by their presence, and thus themselves metaphors for merit.

The guests also bring funds to contribute to the ceremony, but the king rebuffs them, so they put their gifts to the east, south, west, and north of the sacrificial pit as offerings.

This interpretation clearly establishes Buddhism as an esoteric tradition, from Greek *esotero,* 'more within.' First used in English with reference to the Pythagorean doctrines, esotericism explores the hidden meanings and symbols in various philosophical, historical, and religious texts, especially texts central to mainline religions. Thus, the esotericist finds "more within" the traditional texts. This is exactly the method of the Buddha with respect to the mainline practices of Brahmanism. He does not merely *reject* Brahmanism. Rather, he finds an ethical and perhaps spiritual meaning within Brahmanism that has been long forgotten by the Brahmans themselves. Historically, we know that this "forgetting" characterizes the late Vedic period, from about 1000–500 BCE, especially with reference to the true nature of the soma sacrifice.

Another meaning of "esoteric" is "for the few." Thus, when the Buddha attains enlightenment in his 30s he hesitates to teach,

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[84] D 5.23.

[85] *Sota-panna,* one who 'goes down' (*panna*) into the 'current' or 'stream' (*sota*), is probably a pun on one who has 'heard' (*sotā*) the wisdom (*paññā*) with his ear (*sota*), i.e., a *savaka* or 'hearer.' Interestingly, Buddhism uses the metaphor of the stream with reference to the path, samsara, and the metaphysical continuity of sentient consciousness (*santana*).

concerned that most common people will be unable to understand him, but the Brahma Sahampati persuades him to teach *for the sake of the few.*[86] *Thus, Buddhism is an esoteric tradition from its inception.*

Kutadanta, clearly impressed, asks the Buddha if there is another, simpler, more powerful practice. It is not that ritual has no efficacy, which is a naive misinterpretation of the Buddha's view, but rather there is something within ritual that is more efficacious, just as there is something within ethics that is more efficacious, viz., intention. The Buddha responds by giving a list of seven progressively subtler and more powerful practices: giving to virtuous ascetics; providing shelter for the sangha; going for refuge to the Buddha, dharma, and sangha; undertaking the five precepts; morality; insight; and finally the cessation of the corruptions. Beyond that, the Buddha says, "there is nothing further in this world." Note the qualification—he refers only to "this world"; he does not say that there is nothing further in another world: "beyond this there is no sacrifice that is greater and more perfect."[87] This too may be read in two ways. Each of these things is a sacrifice in the pure sense of converting matter to energy in the service of a higher intention. *This universal law of sacrifice is the central principle of the science of spirituality.* The more one sacrifices, the more energy is liberated and the more merit accrued.

Maurice Walshe renders the fifth precept as refraining "from taking strong drink and sloth-producing drugs." This is not translation but interpretation. T. W. Rhys Davids, translating the same formula, has "abstinence from strong, intoxicating, maddening drinks, the root of carelessness," and this is lexically much closer to the Pali. The phrase is *surā-meraya-majja-pamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī.* Surā, meraya, and majja denote intoxicating liquors or drinks; pamāda means heedlessness, carelessness, or negligence; and veramaṇī means abstinence. There is no generic Pali word for "drugs" in this

[86] M 26.20f.
[87] D 5.27.

formula. One may choose to extend the precept doctrinally to other intoxicants, but that is a later interpretive move. It should not be smuggled into the English as though it were what the text itself says.

Kutadanta is so impressed that he becomes a lay follower on the spot, freeing the 3,500 animals that he had collected. The Buddha gives Kutadanta a graduated talk on generosity, morality; the higher planes, dimensions, worlds, or "heavens"; the evils of sense-desires; and the good of renunciation, followed by a dharma talk in brief, viz., the Four Noble Truths. Immediately Kutadanta realizes the truth of transience (*anicca*) and acquires the Dharma Eye, the equivalent of stream entry. The next day Kutadanta entertains the Buddha and his entourage at his home for the morning meal.

Discourse to Mahali

Digha Nikaya 6

Country: Vajji
Locale: Gabled Hall of the Great Forest, Vesali
Speakers: Nagita, Otthaddha, Siha, the Buddha

The sixth sutta of the Digha Nikaya takes place at the Gabled Hall of the Great Forest in Vesali or Visala, at the same location as the present village of Basrah in Vaishali District, Bihar State. Vesali was the capital city of the Licchavi, the dominant ethnic group in the Vajjian (Vrijji) Confederacy, one of the *mahajanapadas,* and the birthplace of Mahavira, the great Jain reformer who was contemporary with the Buddha. The Vajjians were located northeast of Magadha, and are a very early example of a quasi-democratic government. The Licchavi system of government was based on 7,707 rajas, the male heads of households of the dominant kshatriya caste. These met annually to elect a ruling chief raja and a council of nine to assist him, including a deputy chief, a chief of the army, and a chancellor of the exchequer. Both executive and judicial authority are concentrated in the ruling chief. We would call this some sort of responsible patriarchal despotism but, by the standards of the time, it was democratic.

At the time of the Buddha, Vesali is large, rich, prosperous, populous, beautiful, and green. Ambapali, the royal courtesan and dancer who becomes an arhant, is a friend of the Buddha, and entertains him and his entourage at her home, as we will see in a

later sutta.[88] In this sutta, the theme of the "Brahman emissaries in town on some business" reoccurs. They hear of the Buddha and where he is staying, and go to visit him themselves. At the time of this story, Nagita is the personal attendant of the Buddha. The reference to Nagita ostensibly places this sutta before Ananda, in the first twenty years of the Buddha's ministry, though Walshe also finds evidence of a late date of composition in the "intolerably laboured repetition" of the sutta.

The Brahmans arrive at the Gabled Hall during the day, but Nagita is unwilling to give them access to the Buddha, who is in "solitary meditation." The Brahmans sit down and indicate that they will wait. We know that sometimes the Buddha likes to take a nap in the afternoon. Otthaddha the Licchavi arrives with a large entourage. Told the same thing, he too indicates that they will wait. The novice Siha suggests to Nagita that, with so many people waiting, they should be allowed to see the Buddha. Nagita does not want to be responsible for disturbing the Buddha. However, the young novice Siha has no such compunction.

Siha enters his room and explains the situation to him. The Buddha instructs Siha to prepare a seat in the shade of the building.

The Buddha goes outside, and the Brahmans and Licchavis sit before and beside him. Otthaddha prostrates before the Buddha and sits down to one side, but rather than exchanging courtesies with him, as do the Brahmans, he rudely breaks right in with a question: "Lord, not long ago Sunakkhatta the Licchavi came to me and said, 'Soon I shall have been a follower of the Lord for three years. I have seen heavenly sights, pleasant, delightful, enticing, but I have not heard any heavenly sounds that were pleasant, delightful enticing.' Lord, are there any such heavenly sounds, which Sunakkhatta cannot hear, or are there not?"[89] Sunakkhatta is famous for rejecting the Buddha in sutta 24 of the Digha Nikaya because the Buddha does not perform miracles or teach the beginning of things (in fact,

[88] See D 16.2.14ff.
[89] D 6.5.

the Buddha teaches the non-beginning of things, so the objection here does not seem to be that the Buddha does not teach ontology, but that his ontology is non-creationist). Sunakkhatta also expresses admiration for dubious ascetics, such as Korakkhattiya the "dog-man."

The question provides valuable insight into what ordained monastic practitioners of Buddhism at the time of the Buddha were experiencing. The phenomena described—pleasant, delightful, enticing, heavenly *sights*—are a type of phenomenon that one associates with the practice of yoga.[90] The reference to three years provides an interesting insight into how long it takes the Buddha's followers to develop their practice to this level. In modern parlance, this is called "clairvoyance." Otthaddha also alludes to heavenly sounds (clairaudience). This shows that the Buddha's followers are engaged in cultivating altered states of consciousness.

In the Samannaphala Sutta[91] the Buddha recognizes the reality of psychic powers (*iddhis*): self-multiplication, invisibility, the ability to pass through matter, weightlessness, levitation, and the projection of the mental body.[92] This is the first historical reference in India to the idea that psychic powers are produced by ecstatic states (*jhanas*).[93] It is customary to say that the Buddha does not approve of psychic powers, but he never denies that they exist and he exhibits at least some of them himself, especially recalling past lives.

Otthaddha asks the Buddha if there are such sounds and, if there are, why Sunakkhatta cannot hear them. The Buddha's answer is complex, and refers to the psychology of spiritual states, but in

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[90] In Pali, the word *yoga* (lit. 'yoke') is generally used to refer to the state of bondage or attachment. However, it is occasionally used to refer to the state of an arhant (cf. *yogin*). This, however, expresses a merely semantic distinction that has little relevance to what we refer to today as yoga, contrary to the assertion of some authors who take this usage to refer to the Buddha's actual attitude to yoga in the modern sense.

[91] D 2.

[92] 2.87.

[93] White and Wujastyk. *Yoga in Practice,* p. 34.

essence, the Buddha distinguishes between two types of samadhi, *one-sided* and *two-sided.* In the first, only heavenly sights or sounds are experienced and, in the second, both are experienced. There is no indication of how one and two-sided samadhis differ from each other, other than by this fact. Clearly, such states are both known to the Buddha and approved by him, since he does not disapprove of them. Rather, he explains them by situating them in their appropriate context, which is the path.

A word is in order regarding the use of the word, *samadhi.* It turns out that this is an almost impossible word to translate, but must mean something like "bringing the whole mind into perfect coherence with itself," from *sama,* 'just' + *dhi,* 'mind.' In the Hindu system, represented by the classic *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali,*[94] samadhi is the goal of yoga, characterized by the ecstatic concentration of mind but, in Buddhism, it is merely the beginning of the path, synonymous with meditation. The practice of samadhi purifies bad karma, generates merit (*punna*), creates energy (*viriya*), confers insight (*prajna*), and ultimately carries the practitioner to the exalted heights of Right Effort, Right Awareness, and Right Concentration, which lead to nirvana.

Otthaddha asks the Buddha if these samadhi states are the goal of Buddhist monasticism. The Buddha answers that the samadhi states are not the goal, but that there are other higher and perfect states to which they aspire. Rather than deny the value of the samadhi states, the Buddha seems to recognize and accept them as an inferior but necessary stage of the path, which is followed by a superior stage that is the dharma way proper. However, he never disparages the samadhi states in any way; he simply places them in their appropriate context, which is the path (not delusion). Therefore, the path itself has a lower and a higher aspect.

The first goal of the Buddhist path beyond samadhi is the state of a **stream entrant,** which is attained by overcoming the three fetters (belief in a self, doubt, and attachment to rites and rituals).

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[94] See also the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* and the *Shiva Samhita.*

When these are overcome, one will find awakening within seven rebirths. A stream entrant who reduces their greed, hatred, and delusion becomes a **once-returner,** who will only be reborn as a person once more before attaining awakening. The abandonment of the five lower fetters, especially sensual desire and anger, leads to *opapatika,* 'spontaneous rebirth' in a deva sphere, followed by awakening. This is the state of a **non-returner.** Incidentally, this addresses the question of whether devas can attain awakening. It is certainly true of arhants reborn as devas, and there are devas who are Buddhists, at least. Finally, a monastic who extinguishes the corruptions (craving for sensual pleasures, existence, and ignorance) experiences the "uncorrupted deliverance of mind, the deliverance through Wisdom, which he has realized by his own insight."[95] Thus, they become an **arhant.**

Here we encounter the **path of the arhant,** the path that the Buddha taught as the "fast path" to nirvana,[96] even though this is not the path that he himself followed. Despite its emphasis on the path of the arhant, the Pali Canon includes references to the path of the bodhisattva, which is the path of the Buddha, and a clear distinction is always made between the attainment of the Buddha, who discovered the dharma as a result of following the path of the bodhisattva, and the arhant, who follows the dharma discovered by the Buddha, which I call the primogeniture of the Buddha. As Bhikku Bodhi admits in his essay on "Arahants, Bodhisattvas and Buddhas," this distinction pervades the Pali Canon.[97] Although the arhant too attains a kind of wisdom, his pre-eminent attainment is dispassion, based on the negation of desirous attachment, corresponding to the eighth and ninth *nidanas* of the chain of interdependent origination, whereas the pre-eminent attainment of the

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[95] D 6.13.

[96] Tantra is also represented as a "fast path," though to buddhahood rather than arhantship. The path of an arhant may also be characterized as the path of a monastic, whereas the path of Tantra is the path of a householder.

[97] Cf. Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism,* p. 16.

Buddha is Absolute Wisdom, the negation of ignorance, the ultimate root cause, the first *nidana*. Therefore, if Buddhism has a God, it is Ignorance or Not-knowing. Thus, both the path of the bodhisattva and its superiority to the path of the arhant is implicitly recognized in the Pali Canon; this is not a Mahayana innovation. The distinction between the arhant and the Buddha corresponds to the distinction between desirous attachment and ignorance, which in turn correspond to the distinction between virtue and wisdom respectively. The highest state is the mind delivered by wisdom and insight, the cure of ignorance, the ultimate root cause of samsara.

Otthaddha asks the Buddha if there is a path or method that leads to these higher states. The Buddha reveals the Noble Eightfold Path: "This is the path, this is the way to the realisation of these things."[98]

The Noble Eightfold Path (Pali *ariyo atthangiko maggo,* Skt. *aryastangamarga*) is the True Eightfold Way that leads to the higher states. This way is a sequence of steps, like any path, a point made by Peter Masefield, beginning with Right View (*samma-ditthi),* Perfect Wisdom, and ending with Right Concentration (*samma-samadhi*), Perfect Attention, through three phases: Wisdom (*prajna*), Virtue (*sila*), and Samadhi.[99] From the perspective of one approaching the path, the outer aspect of the path is Wisdom.[100] Its inner aspect is Virtue. Its ultimate aspect is Samadhi.

The Buddha then tells Otthaddha the story of an experience that the Buddha had in Ghosita Park, Kosambi. Mandissa and Jaliya, two wanderers, ask the Buddha, "is the soul (*jiva*) the same as the body, or is the soul one thing and the body another."[101]

Jiva, here translated 'soul,' is a synonym for *atta* that refers to the vitality of the body,[102] i.e., the questioner wants to know the

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[98] D 6.14.
[99] *Divine Revelation in the Pali Canon,* chap. 2, passim.
[100] "Right view comes first" (Mahacattarisaka Sutta, M 117).
[101] D 6.15.
[102] Cf. the Cabalistic *nephesh.*

Buddha's opinion regarding the nature of animation, the difference between living and dead matter. Is there some essential animating principle that is distinct from the physical body, or is the life of the body simply an epiphenomenon and the body all there is? The Buddha's answer is subtle and nuanced: "I do not say that the [life] is either the same as or different from the body."[103] Although this threatens to turn into a *tetralemma,* it is not. This can be interpreted in various ways, as:

1. A refusal to answer the question;
2. An expression of agnosticism with respect to the question;
3. A refusal to make the distinction implied (i.e., rejection of the premise);
4. A statement that the question is logically meaningless; thus, there is no answer.

However, only the fourth option is parsimonious. By not saying that life is the same as the body, the Buddha affirms the individual transcendent sentient continuity or 'mind-stream' (*santana*), whereas by not saying that the life is different form the body, he affirms the intuition of the body as sentience. Thus, the Buddhist practice par excellence is awareness of the body. This story of Mandissa and Jaliya is repeated in the Jaliya Sutta.[104]

[103] D 6.16, 19.
[104] D 7.

Discourse to Jaliya

Digha Nikaya 7

Country: Vatsa
Locale: Ghosita Park, Kosambi
Speakers: Mandisa, Jaliya, the Buddha

The Jaliya Sutta repeats paragraphs 15 to 19 of sutta 6, q.v. We will not discuss it further here.

The Great Lion's Roar

Digha Nikaya 8

Country: uncertain
Locale: deer park of Kannakatthale at Ujunnaya
Speakers: Kassapa, the Buddha

The location of this sutta is the deer park of Kannakatthale in Ujunnaya. Several Kassapas are referred to in the Pali Canon, including the third Buddha of the current age (*kappa;* Skt. *kalpa*) and Mahakassapa, the disciple foremost in asceticism, who convenes the First Buddhist Council shortly after the Buddha's passing (*parinibbana*). However, this Kassapa is identified as a naked ascetic. Kassapa wants to know whether it is true, as the wanderers of other sects say, that the Buddha does not approve of austerity and self-mortification, presumably because these are the practices to which Kassapa adheres. The question of the Buddha's alleged laxness seems to be an issue.

These are the kinds of practices in which the Buddha engaged during the six years that he practised asceticism prior to his enlightenment, including public nudity; anti-social behaviour; avoiding pregnant women, sex, etc.; living on windfalls; vegetarianism; abstinence; fasting; dressing in rags and rough garments; self-mortification; living on filth; and, paradoxically, ritual self-purification.

These practices were common among ascetics in the Buddha's time as they are in India today. There are various rationales for them, including breaking the bond of attachment to the body by torturing the latter, and to society by breaking the taboos of the

latter, similar to certain tantric practices that grow out of them and, perhaps paradoxically, not harming living beings, cultivating mental concentration and clarity, and self-purification.

Surprisingly, since we know that the Buddha *does not* approve of these practices, the Buddha states that Kassapa's sources are not telling the truth and are in fact slandering him with lies. Rather, the Buddha states that practitioners of such mortifications may be reborn in a good or bad state. Similarly, those who do not practise such mortifications may also be reborn in a good or a bad state. Thus, the Buddha declares, since practitioners of self-mortification may be reborn in a good state, how can it be said that he does not approve of all such austerities? At least, this is the apparent implication of the Buddha's rather odd response to Kassapa's question. However, as it turns out, the Buddha has his own definition of asceticism, so the Buddha's response may be understood that way too.

The Buddha then states that sometimes his views correspond to the views of other sages, but sometimes they do not. He describes in detail his teaching method of consensus: "On approaching them I say, 'In these things there is no agreement, let us leave them aside. In these things there is agreement: there let the wise take up, cross-question and criticize these matters with the teachers or with their followers, saying, 'Of those things that are unskilful and reckoned as such, censurable, to be refrained from, unbefitting a Noble One, black, and reckoned as such—who is there who has completely abandoned such things and is free from them: the ascetic Gotama, or some other venerable teachers?"[105] In other words, identify common ground, analyze it rationally, and apply that analysis critically. The word translated 'unskilful' is *akusala,* the negative of the Pali and Sanskrit word *kusala,* meaning, 'clever,' 'skilful,' 'expert,' 'good,' 'right,' 'meritorious,' referring especially to any thought, word, or deed productive of good karma. In conclusion, he asserts that there is a course of training that leads to direct knowledge

[105] D 8.5.

(gnosis) of these things, viz., the Noble Eightfold Path: "This is the path whereby one may know and see for oneself: 'The ascetic Gotama speaks at the proper time, what is true, to the point'—the Dharma and the discipline."[106]

With respect to the specific practices, the Buddha qualifies his previous statement that he does not disapprove of austerities and self-mortification by saying that a practitioner of self-mortification in whom three things are not developed or brought to realization is not an ascetic or a Brahman. These three things are:

- Morality;
- Heart; and
- Wisdom.

Specifically, morality refers to non-enmity and non-anger. "Heart" refers to compassion (*metta*).[107] In addition, wisdom means

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[106] D 8.13.

[107] Interestingly, this list reflects the Threefold Division of the Noble Eightfold Path consisting of Morality, Meditation, and Wisdom, except that Heart replaces Meditation (or Concentration). Although this order of the Threefold Division is popular among religious and fundamentalist Buddhists, who prefer to emphasize Virtue and regard Wisdom as something to be attained mainly through Meditation based on a foundation of Virtue (i.e., the monastic life), this is not how the Noble Eightfold Path is presented in the Pali Canon. Rather, the Threefold Division is the invention of a female monastic, Dhammadinna (in the Culavedalla Sutta, M 44), who the Buddha declares to be the nun foremost in wisdom. These Three Higher Trainings (the Buddha says) supersede the rules of the Vinaya. A Vajjian monastic complains to the Buddha that he cannot stand such training with so many rules and regulations. Rather than reprimand him, the Buddha asks him whether he can stand the threefold training in higher morality, higher thought, and higher insight (A 3.84). It seems that the Buddha adopts this formula in the middle of his teaching career. This implies that the order of the steps of the path is not the Buddha's overriding concern. Nevertheless, the Noble Eightfold Path implies a sequence, whereas the Three Higher Trainings do not (see M 117.34). Therefore, we should not ignore the order of the steps: Wisdom, Virtue, and Meditation. This implies that the experience of Gnosis is the foundation of Virtue, because *one acts in accordance with what one knows,* with Meditation as the culminating step. Thus, the first phase of the Mahayana, contemporary with the

abandoning the corruptions of sensory desire, anger, sloth-torpor, restlessness-worry, and doubt. Thus, he "realizes and dwells in the uncorrupted deliverance of mind, the *deliverance through wisdom,* having realized it in this very life by his own *insight*; then, Kassapa, that monk is termed an ascetic and a Brahmin"[108] (italics added).

This whole dialogue is another example of the Buddha's teaching method, whereby he finds common ground, agrees with the questioner, and then "reframes" the question through critical analysis in order to arrive at a different and more profound conclusion.

Kassapa says that it is *hard to be* an ascetic and a Brahman. To this objection the Buddha replies that the list of mechanical practices can be practised by anyone—even by a slave girl who draws water, thus gravely insulting Kassapa's doctrine. However, the Buddha says, there is a completely different kind of asceticism that is truly hard, and that the monastic who practises this kind of asceticism is the true ascetic and the true Brahman. This asceticism is the practice of morality, heart, and wisdom.

Kassapa objects that it is *hard to understand* an ascetic and a Brahman. Akin to his previous response, the Buddha says that these mechanical practices are easy to understand.

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codification of the Pali Canon, is the Prajnaparamita, with its emphasis on *prajna* or 'Wisdom.' This presentation of the path corresponds exactly to the way that the Buddha's practice is empirically presented in the Pali Canon, and has the effect of opening up the path to householders. Although the Buddha describes many different meditative and ethical practices, the primacy of Wisdom as the essential salvific principle pervades the Pali Canon like a refrain. This becomes obvious when one reads the canon in its entirety. Many lay people, when they hear the Buddha speak, become stream entrants, whereupon they retire into seclusion to practise meditation. The act of *hearing* the Buddha *speak* is central (cf. Masefield, *Divine Revelation in the Pali Canon,* pp. 45–50). The Buddha says that, depending on one's karma, it is possible to attain arhantship in five or seven days, *at the least*. The function of meditation appears mainly as a secondary process of concentration, which amplifies the power of the essential realization. This power can also be directed in specific ways and with specific intentions. Thus, meditation produces beneficial karma, analogous to but more subtle and therefore more powerful than merit based on acts.

[108] D 8.17.

Rather obtusely, since the Buddha just told him twice, Kassapa asks the Buddha to explain the development of morality, heart, and wisdom, so the Buddha reiterates the perfections of morality, heart, and wisdom already expounded in the previous suttas, asserting that there is nothing beyond this. These include the moral or ethical practices, restraint, the four meditative attainments, the various insights, and finally the cessation of the corruptions just mentioned.

Finally, the Buddha declares that, of all the ascetics and Brahmans known to him, the Buddha has achieved the highest morality, austerity, wisdom, and liberation. This declaration is the "lion's roar" of the Buddha, which he qualifies citing ten criteria:

1. He teaches the wanderers of other sects, rather than retiring into seclusion;
2. He speaks confidently, not diffidently;
3. He allows himself to be questioned;
4. Being questioned, he gives answers;
5. His answers are convincing;
6. His answers are pleasing;
7. Those who hear him are satisfied with his teachings;
8. Those who hear him behave as though they were satisfied;
9. They believe him to be telling the truth; and
10. They are satisfied with the practices.

Altogether, these ten criteria establish the truth or validity of the Buddha's speech (*Buddhavacana*). Thus, "the ascetic Gotama roars his lion's roar, in company and confidently, they question him and he answers, he wins them over with his answers, they find it pleasing and are satisfied with what they have heard, they behave as if they were satisfied, they are on the path of truth, and they are satisfied with the practice."[109] Of particular interest is the emphasis on questioning. Despite clear indications elsewhere that the dharma

[109] D 8.22.

transcends mere reasoning, it is also clear that it can be rationally apprehended, discussed, and criticized within the limits of reason itself. Here we see another indication of trans-duality, in this case, the simultaneous rationality and trans-rationality of the dharma. In fact, the entire Pali Canon turns on this characteristic, most if not all the suttas revolving around a dialogue in which the Buddha is asked questions and he answers.

Kassapa is so impressed with the Buddha that he converts on the spot and seeks admission to the sangha, but the Buddha advises him that, as a member of another sect, Kassapa must wait four months, after which he may be ordained by "the monks who are established in mind."[110] However, the Buddha makes an exception because of Kassapa's declaration that, let alone four months, he would gladly wait four years to receive the Buddha's ordination. Impressed, the Buddha ordains him immediately. Kassapa goes into seclusion and, after a short time, attains arhantship, a formula that is repeated all through the suttas.

We will encounter the phrase "the lion's roar" two more times in the Digha Nikaya, in the Great Lion's Roar to the Udumbarikans, and the Lion's Roar on the Turning of the Wheel.[111]

[110] D 8.24.
[111] D 25, 26.

Discourse to Potthapada

Digha Nikaya 9

Country: Kosala
Locales: Jeta's grove in Anthapindika's Park, Savatthi; the debating hall near the tinduka *tree, in the single-halled park of Queen Mallika*
Speakers: Potthapada, the Buddha, Citta

At the time of the Buddha, Savatthi was one of the six largest cities of India. It was the capital of Kosala, ruled by King Pasenadi, a follower of the Buddha. According to Buddhaghosa, the city had a population of almost sixty thousand families, at a time when families were quite large. Even today, this would be a medium-sized city. It seems the Buddha spent slightly more than half of his time here.

Anathapindika is the chief lay disciple of the Buddha. Extremely wealthy, he gave Jeta Park (or Grove) to the sangha. Queen Mallika is the wife of King Pasenadi. The *tinduka* tree must have been a popular meeting spot. The *tinduka* is also called the Gaub tree, Malabar ebony, black and white ebony, or pale moon ebony. *Tinduka* trees grow to thirty-five meters in height with large black trunks and yellow, astringent fruits. Impervious to insects, they have medicinal and other uses.

Often in the Pali Canon we read that the Buddha rises early; sometimes he is awake in the early morning hours as well. Whether this is due to insomnia or awakening we cannot say. In any case, it

is too early to go to Savatthi for alms, so the Buddha stops at the debating hall of Queen Mallika, which (one assumes) is on the way. There, Potthapada, a wandering religious mendicant or recluse (*paribbajaka*), is sitting with a crowd of wanderers, engaged in loud and boisterous talk.

A wanderer or a *paribbajaka* is essentially a philosopher. When Potthapada sees the Buddha approaching, he shushes the wanderers out of respect for the Buddha. Potthaapada welcomes him as though he had been hoping for a long time that he would see or meet him. The Buddha must know (of) Potthaapada, since the sutta says that the Buddha goes to Jeta's Grove with the intention of seeing Potthapada.

The Buddha asks Potthapada what he and the other wanderers are talking about. Instead, Potthapada wants to find out what the Buddha thinks of a hot topic of conversation among the ascetics and Brahmans, viz., the "higher extinction of consciousness" (in the translation of Maurice Walshe). The word is *abhisannanirodha.* This is a Pali compound made up of *abhi* + *sanna* + *nirodha*. The concept is not necessarily Buddhist, but was used by certain wanderers. However, the Buddha makes the term his own in his explanation of it. *Abhi* means 'over,' in the sense of 'overcoming,' 'overlord,' etc.; *sanna* is the cognitive perception of the senses that constitutes consciousness as it is experienced; *nirodha* is the annihilation that is the absolute and final freedom. "Trans-sensory liberation" is something that the Buddha might have an opinion on.

The conversation turns on how this takes place. According to one view, "perceptions" arise and cease without cause or condition. Consciousness is just this arising of perceptions, unconsciousness (or "non-percipience," according to Access to Insight) the non-arising of perceptions. Therefore, *abhisannanirodha* is just random chance. *This sounds like modern speculations about the origin of life.* This is the first view put forward, which happens to be the view of Western secular materialism today.

According to another view, what I am calling "cognitive sensory perception" is the self. As the self comes and goes, so does cognitive sensory perception. *Therefore, for example, during sleep the self*

leaves the body. Another theory is that consciousness is drawn in and out of the body by powerful ascetics, Brahmans, or devas. *This last description sounds like shamanism, where shamans and spirits wield powerful effects over consciousness.*

The Buddha categorically denies that perceptions arise without causes or conditions. Thus, the Buddha asserts the absoluteness of the Law of Karma.[112] This should tip one off immediately that karma is part of dharma, which, being coterminous with reality, is the only permanent "thing." It is the motive force, so to speak, that underlies the whole process of infinitely intervolved differentiation.

Perceptions are amenable to training. Today we would call this "neuroplasticity." This training consists of morality followed by meditation. In this classification, there are two divisions. Meditation consists of the eight jhanas. The word *jhana* is another of those words that defies translation. Etymologically, its English cognate is 'gnosis' or 'knowledge.' *Jhana* is the Pali of Sanskrit *dhyana,* meaning 'attention,' which became the penultimate trance prior to samadhi in Patanjali's yoga. Jhana is thus a kind of concentrated trance state in an ascending hierarchy of seven or eight modes. These modes are not "merely" psychological in the modern sense. They are also ontological, so the attainment of a mode is essentially the attainment of rebirth in the world corresponding to that mode. Thus, there is a correspondence of modes and worlds.

[112] This need not imply determinism, however, since this would undermine freedom of will or intention and, therefore, abnegation of personal responsibility. The Buddha repudiates this view as an error of the Jains. See M.101.2, S 36.21, and A 3.61. Karma is only one of eight specific causes of feelings in particular, as well as bile, phlegm, wind, imbalance, climate, carelessness, and assault (see S 36.21).

The meditative attainments and the spiritual worlds

Jhanas	Deva worlds (simplified)	Qualities
The Formless realm		
7	Sphere of nothing	Transcends dimension of infinite consciousness
6	Sphere of infinite consciousness	Transcends dimension of infinite space
5	Sphere of infinite space	Transcends perceptions of physical form, perceptions of resistance disappear, perceptions of diversity not heeded, perceives infinite space
The Form realm		
4	Five pure abodes of the arhants	Abandons pleasure and pain
3	Glorious devas	Rapture fades, equanimous, mindful, alert, senses pleasure with body
2	Radiant devas	Stills directed thoughts and evaluations
1	Brahma worlds	Withdraws from sensual pleasures and unskilled mental qualities

Perhaps the seven or eight meditative attainments were the basis of Buddhist cosmology, which was subsequently elaborated into the thirty-one planes of existence.[113] The essential faculty present in this aspiration is *sakasanni hoti,* which Walshe translates as 'controlled perception.' In Pali, this is our familiar *sanna,* 'cognitive sense perception,' qualified by *saka,* 'own,' 'proper,' 'self,' and followed by *hoti,* 'being,' 'becoming'—perhaps the nature of the self's self-sense, reflexivity. This seed develops through stages into the "limit of perception." At this stage one transcends thinking altogether, the coarse perceptions cease and one achieves the complete emancipation of consciousness.

The Buddha's answer shows intimate acquaintance with the meditation asked about. It also describes the process of meditation itself; despite the fact that the Buddha rejected his first two teachers, he continues to teach their methods to a degree.

[113] Cf. the thirty-two paths of wisdom of the Cabalistic Tree of Life (the *Etz Chaim*).

Thus, *sakasanni hoti* is beyond the seventh meditative attainment, the highest "perception attainment," which raises the question of its relationship to the eighth meditative attainment, which is not included in this description.

Potthapada repeats the gist of the Buddha's comments on *abhisannanirodha:* "from the moment when a monk has gained this controlled perception, he proceeds from stage to stage until he reaches the limit of perception. He attains cessation, and that is the way in which the cessation of perception is brought about by successive steps."[114] Thus, the cultivation of *sakasanni hoti* ('controlled perception') is the essential task of meditation. This cultivation is, moreover, a continuous and progressive process, a.k.a. the gradual path. Literally 'becomes own-perceiving,' more properly, 'own-cognitive sensory perception becoming,' Walshe interprets this as implying increasing control, as in concentration. Moreover, the essence of concentration is awareness. Thus, the reflexivity of consciousness dissolves the gross sensations in perception, which dissolves into consciousness itself and so disappears in the act of reflexive self-becoming. This is the whole process of awareness.

Potthapada then asks the Buddha about "the summit of perception,"[115] presumably the same as the "limit of perception" and the goal of *sakasanni hoti* that automatically is transformed into its opposite, *abhisannanirodha: Is it one or many? Does perception arise before knowledge? Is perception a person's self? Is the world eternal? Is the soul the same as the body? Does the Tathagata exist after death?*

The Buddha begins by answering Potthapada's questions, which contradicts the common view that the Buddha has no ontology and always refuses to answer metaphysical questions. Rather, the

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[114] D 9.18.

[115] The Jhana Sutta (A 9.36) describes the summit of perception as "the deathless element…: 'This is peaceful, this is sublime [the summit], that is, the stilling of all activities, the relinquishing of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, nibbana.'"

Buddha posits metaphysical trans-dualism—a mental world characterized by infinite differentiation and non-differentiation, the latter the ineffable essence of sentience itself. *This world is real.* Hence, perception precedes knowledge, a fact that neuroscience has proved. Potthapada wants to know whether perception is the self, or is the self something else? The Buddha shows Potthapada that no matter how he thinks about the self—whether as the physical body, a mental (or "astral") body, or formless—perceptions and the self have to be different. Perceptions change continuously, but the "identity" is permanent.

Potthapada then wants to verify this empirically. How can he know the non-perceptual self? The Buddha implies that one must know the dharma in order to know this, implying that knowledge precedes attainment. So far, the Buddha has been happy to answer all of Potthapada's questions. Rather than penetrate the dharma, Potthapada shies away and begins to ask the Buddha unrelated speculative questions about cosmology, the soul, and the post-mortem state.

The Buddha's attitude toward Potthapada changes. He tells Potthapada that he refuses to discuss these questions because they are not conducive to enlightenment. Potthapada had his chance when he was discussing the nature of the self with the Buddha—surely a metaphysical question. However, he erred when he decided that the question was too deep for him, meaning he was not willing to step outside the frame of reference of "his own" sect as the Buddha was implicitly inviting him to do. Some think that the Buddha's use of the *tetralemma* here implies that the questions are intrinsically meaningless, but the Buddha never says that, only that he has "not declared that." Rather, he says, he has declared the Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths are ontological statements too.

After the Buddha leaves, the wanderers mock Potthapada for kowtowing to the Buddha, professing that they do not understand why he refused to answer Potthapada's questions about cosmology, the soul, and the post-mortem state. Apparently, such questions were standard fare for other teachers. Potthapada agrees that he

does not understand the Buddha's reticence, but that his practice is sound, so why should he not acknowledge that?

Two or three days later Potthapada goes to visit the Buddha along with Citta, the son of an elephant trainer. Potthapada tells the Buddha what the wanderers said, to which the Buddha replies by calling them "blind and sightless." The Buddha explains that speculations about cosmology, the self (or soul), and the post-mortem state of a tathagata are declared to be "uncertain" because they are not conducive to nirvana. On the other hand, the Four Noble Truths are subjects conducive to nirvana. Thus, the Buddha distinguishes between "uncertain" or "undeclared" dharmas and dharmas conducive to nirvana. The Buddha contrasts his way to ascetics and Brahmans who speculate based on beliefs, the implication being that the Buddha's way is directly experienced and empirical—a yoga, in effect.

I see this whole difference as less of a dogmatic refusal to discuss certain types of philosophical questions than as two different attitudes toward metaphysical knowing, one ontological and speculative (identified here with the "Brahmanic") and one phenomenological, in the sense of being grounded in the experiential immediacy of the subject-object relationship.

Potthapada has already alluded to three ways of thinking about the self—as a physical body, a mental body, or a formless self; now the Buddha recurs to this topic, confirming that there are three kinds of "acquired" self—gross, mind-made, and formless. The Pali for 'acquired self' in Walshe's translation is *atta-patilabha. Atta* is 'self,' 'body,' 'person,' 'individuality'; 'life,' 'mind,' 'soul'; in a non-Buddhist sense, it is the 'paramatman' or 'Universal Soul.' In other suttas, the Buddha famously denies the absoluteness of the *atta*. However, it also means self in the conventional sense, or ego-identity. *Patilabha* is 'attainment,' 'acquisition,' 'obtaining,' perhaps—*architectonic*. Thus, the person, perhaps the "psyche," is "built up" of three "levels"— the gross material body, composed of elements and dependent on food; the "astral body" that duplicates the form of the physical body as a kind of template of the latter (cf. the kinesthetic body); and formless perception, i.e., consciousness

itself, in a sort of pyramidal structure that mimics Buddhist cosmology.[116]

Some people might be surprised to learn that the Pali Canon refers to a "mind-made self" that is a perfect duplicate of the physical body. This seems to be the root of the tantric concepts of multiple bodies and energy bodies. The mental body is a universal paradigm in experiential spiritualities, including Buddhism, and seems to have its origin in shamanism. The Pali Canon says that this body can be separated from the physical body in the fourth meditative attainment; this body can travel anywhere, including to other stars, planets, and worlds, and has the same senses as the physical body but without physicality (i.e., it is virtual). The "acquired self" is acquired in the sense that karma is acquired; thus, it has the connotation of ego or psyche rather than perfect or ideal self. This "ego-self" is not absolute, but is subject to continuous change in its essence. Therefore, it is malleable. It is the willing self of experience, unlike the vain ontological speculations of the Brahmans.

The Buddha teaches a doctrine for "getting rid of" (the Access to Insight translation has "abandoning") the "gross acquired self," thus purifying the mind of defiling mental states. As a result, the purity and perfection of wisdom arise spontaneously, wisdom beyond wisdom that Walshe translates as "superknowledge."[117] The Buddha contrasts this dharma wisdom with the speculative sophistry of the Brahmans, and declares that it is a state of perfect happiness, in contrast to those who think of spiritual states as purely negative and without affect.

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[116] Cf. the *nirmanakaya,* the emanation body; the *sambhogakaya,* the bliss body; and the *dharmakaya,* the truth body characterized by emptiness, of the Mahayana Trikaya doctrine. It is also worth noting that even at the highest possible stage the Buddha still has a body.

[117] The Pali word *abhinna* consists of *abhi,* 'over-' or 'super-,' plus *jna,* in Sanskrit, 'wisdom' or 'knowledge.' The word is nearly a synonym for psychic powers, but may also refer more broadly to transcendent knowledge or realization, an association that Buddhism seems to introduce to Indian civilization.

Similarly, the Buddha teaches a doctrine for "getting rid of" the mental body and the formless body too, as they are experienced. The Buddha says, "This is the gross acquired self…mind-made acquired self…formless acquired self for the getting rid of which we teach a doctrine."[118] Thus, the Buddha implies that his dharma is entirely based on experience, on what is demonstrable and knowable; one can follow its methods with confidence, knowing that they are based on sound experiential principles and not theories.

Citta, the son of the elephant trainer, having heard this exchange, wants to know if the three bodies always coexist and if one is fundamental. The Buddha says that only one body is experienced at a time, just as only the *now* is experienced, not the past or the future, which nevertheless exist in some sense. The Buddha says that these terms—gross material acquired self, mind-made acquired self, and formless acquired self—are merely labels, which the Tathagata uses without misconstruing their inherent emptiness.

This, Walshe notes, became the basis of the Buddhist doctrine of two truths, ultimate and conventional. This is also referred to in the famous first line of the Tao Te Ching, "The Way that can be spoken of is not the enduring and unchanging Way. The name that can be named is not the enduring and unchanging name."[119] In Walshe's translation, names are also called "expressions, turns of speech, designations in common use in the world, which the Tathagata uses without misapprehending them." [120] Alfred Korzybski, the founder of General Semantics, expresses this in the famous aphorism, "the map is not the territory."[121] Language inherently distorts reality, and though it communicates a semblance of experience, it cannot duplicate experience itself, which is ineffable in its essence. *Thus, the Buddhist project is to access the intuitively immediate pre-*

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[118] D 9.43ff.
[119] Op. cit., ch. 1. Translation adapted from the Chinese Text Project.
[120] D 9.53.
[121] See *Science and Sanity,* passim.

linguistic experiential consciousness. This consciousness is inherently ontologically real and valid.

Potthapada the wanderer becomes a lay follower of the Buddha. Does this mean that he has renounced the wandering life and become a householder? Interestingly, Citta, the son of the elephant trainer, who appears out of nowhere but is clearly metaphysically inclined, asks to join the sangha and is given the "going forth" and ordained by the Buddha. Citta goes into seclusion and, after a short time, attains arhantship.

Discourse to Subha

Digha Nikaya 10

Country: Kosala
Locale: Anathapindika park in Savatthi
Speakers: Ananda, Subha

The location of this sutta is the same as the previous sutta: Jeta's Grove in Anathapindika Park in Savatthi, except that instead of the Buddha Ananda is speaking and the Buddha is deceased. At the same time, Subha, the young son of the Brahman Todeyya, is also in Savatthi on some business. Learning that Ananda is nearby, he sends his servant to invite Ananda to come to his house. However, Ananda demurs due to sickness and suggests that he come the next day. Early the next morning, Ananda goes to Subha's home, accompanied by the venerable monastic Cetaka, for their morning meal.

Subha would like Ananda to tell him which things the Buddha praised and dispraised during his life. Ananda says that the Buddha praised the Threefold Division of the Noble Eightfold Path: Morality, Concentration, and Wisdom, reiterating, however, sutta 1, where the Buddha says that the practice of morality alone is inadequate. Ananda's statement makes the Threefold Division a kind of summative doctrine of the dharma, which explains its subsequent popularity.

Discourse to Kevaddha

Digha Nikaya 11

Country: Magadha
Locale: Pavarika's mango grove in Nalanda
Speakers: Kevaddha, the Buddha

The location of this sutta is Pavarika's mango grove, in Nalanda, which almost a thousand years later would become the site of the first Buddhist university. Nalanda is described as rich, populous, prosperous, and strongly Buddhist. The householder Kevaddha, possibly a fisher, suggests that since the Buddha has so much support in the town already, if a monastic performed some superhuman feat or miracle, that would increase the town's faith in the Buddha even more. The Buddha rather sharply informs Kevaddha that this is not how he trains the monastics of the Buddhist order. When Kevaddha presses the Buddha, the Buddha says that there are three kinds of miracle:

- "Psychic" powers (*iddhi*);
- Telepathy (*adesana*); and
- Instruction (*anusasani*).

Adesana, which Walshe translates 'telepathy,' can also mean 'prophecy.'

The distinction made here between psychic powers and telepathy seems to be between powers experienced, somewhat paradoxically, in the body (e.g., self-replication, invisibility, passing through solid objects, etc.), and the mind (i.e., telepathy). Perhaps "psychic" is a poor translation here, because in customary usage telepathy is also

a psychic power. However, one struggles to find a satisfactory alternative. Perhaps "magical powers," which are referred to in the canon, might be better, but in English, the word "magical" also has connotations of sleight of hand and charlatanry. "Supernormal" or "supernatural" are even worse because, from the Buddhist perspective, these powers are entirely natural. The word *iddhi* literally means 'attainment.' Finally, the "miracle of instruction" is compared and contrasted with these.

The Buddha says that he "dislikes and despises" miracles, such as psychic powers and telepathy, not because they do not exist, but because those who see such a display of power may simply think that they are the result of some kind of *personal* power or some technical or magical *procedure,* rather than crediting the *dharma* that is the real cause of these things. Thus, they may be directed toward sorcery rather than salvation. In the West, we might call this "occultism."

Against these, the Buddha posits the *miracle of instruction* or teaching. Why is "teaching" a miracle? The Buddha refers specifically to the *Power of Truth.* This doctrine pervades the Pali Canon, especially in the Jataka tales, where truth itself, especially the truth of the dharma, the pre-eminent truth of reality, is intrinsically efficacious (the so-called Act of Truth). In other suttas, the Buddha says that dharma and things related to the dharma are supremely efficacious. The Buddha makes it clear that we are discussing a philosophy: "Consider in this way, don't consider in that; direct your mind this way, not that way, give up that, gain this and persevere in it."[122] In addition to philosophy, the Buddha refers to practices of renunciation and cultivation and refers to the significance of perseverance. Thus, one may speak of practice as involving a kind of 'energy' (v*iriya*).

Moreover, Buddhist philosophy is distinguished in this, that it requires *action* and that it leads to the highest *goal.* Buddhism is, pre-eminently, a philosophy of action (i.e., practice). As we have

[122] D 11.8.

seen before, this is accomplished by the attainment of the unity of morality, meditation, and wisdom, because of which one attains cessation. This is the supreme ontological attainment, the supreme "psychic power." Although the Buddha says he rejects them, he also says that he has mastered psychic powers and telepathy in addition to the third miracle of instruction. Here the Buddha appears in the guise of a tantric guru. We have seen how the Buddha teaches that spiritual realization leads to psychic powers as well, possibly the first Indian to make this association. There may also be other ways of looking at these, which we will discuss in later suttas.

Kevaddha's request to the Buddha to prove himself by means of psychic powers is impertinent. The Buddha tells him the story of another impertinent monastic. This monastic, who is not named, made samadhi (meditated or concentrated) on the question, "I wonder where the four great elements—the earth element, the water element, the fire element, the air element—cease without remainder."[123] Today we would call this *vipassana,* which means something like 'transcendent vision' or 'insight' (lit. 'true seeing,' 'seeing beyond sight,' 'second sight'), but in this context it is almost a kind of divination.

So intense is the monastic's concentration that a vortex opens before him, leading to the transcendent deva worlds. Thus, he travels vertically through the deva worlds,[124] including the realms of the Four Great Kings (the world of nature spirits); the Thirty-Three Gods or Heavens (*trayastrimsa*; essentially anthropomorphic deities, alluding originally to the Vedic pantheon); the Yama devas; Tusita (the home of the bodhisattvas); Nimmanarati (creative shape-shifting spirits); Paranimmita-Vasavatti (spirits who parasitically delight in the creations of others; these are the capitalists of the *kamaloka*); and the brahma devas, who enjoy the first meditative attainment, governed by the Great Brahma, who we would call

[123] D 11.67.

[124] This practice is known in the Western esoteric tradition as "Rising on the Planes."

simply God. He speaks to the inhabitants and the rulers of these realms, none of whom know the answer. Incidentally, we learn in the course of this sutta the names of the rulers of each of these realms, which I tabulate below.

Names and rulers of Buddhist realms

Pali name of realm	English translation	Name of ruler
The Form realm (*rupaloka*)		
Brahma-parisajja	Retinue of Brahma	Brahma[a]
The Sensual realm (*kamaloka*)		
Paranimmita-vasavatti	Devas wielding power over others' creations	Vasavatti
Nimmanarati	Devas delighting in creation	Sunimmita
Tusita	Contented	Santusita
Yama	Hours	Suyama
Tavatimsa	Thirty-three	Sakka[b]
Catumaharajika	Four great kings	Four great kings[c]

a. Brahma is more of a title than a name. Several brahmas are referred to in the Pali Canon, including Baka; Sahampati, who convinced the Buddha to teach the dharma; and Sanat Kumara, of Theosophical fame.

b. Mitra, Aryaman, Bhaga, Varuna, Daksa, Amsa, Tvastr, Pusan, Vivasvat, Savitr, Indra, Vishu (twelve "personified deities" or *adityas*); Ananda, Vijnana, Manas, Prana, Vac, Isana, Tatpurusa, Aghora, Vamadeva, Sadyojata, Atma (eleven forms and followers of the god Rudra-Shiva, consisting of five abstractions, five names of Siva, and the Atma or 'self'); Prithivi, Agni, Antariksa, Jal, Vayu, Dyaus, Surya, Naksatra, Soma (eight deities of material elements, or Vasus); Indra, Prajapati (two solar deities). These are not named in the sutta.

c. The names of the Four Great Kings, not given in this sutta, are Vaisravana, 'he who hears everything'; Virudhaka, 'he who causes to grow'; Dhrtarastra, 'he who upholds the realm'; and Virupaksa, 'he who sees all.'

To the theist, Indian or Abrahamic—and we must remember that Hinduism is mainly theistic—the Buddhist view of God seems sacrilegious and, it seems, deliberately so, similar to the Gnostic demiurge, whether or not Gnosticism is influenced by Buddhist ideas, as suggested by Edward Conze and Elaine Pagels.[125] One cannot escape the note of irony and humour in the Buddha's story, which

[125] See Pagels, *Gnostic Gospels,* p. xxi.

need not imply that the Buddha does not believe in the vertical dimension of reality or even in the devas themselves. Great Brahma is unpredictable—"we do not know when, how, and where Brahma will appear. However, when the signs are seen—when a light appears and radiance shines forth—then Brahma will appear. Such signs are an indication that he will appear."[126]

We noted the literal meaning of devas as 'shining ones.' Brahma himself is not identified with the radiant light. Rather, the radiant light is a *prelude* to the appearance of Brahma, who is invisible, unknown, and unpredictable. After a short time, Brahma appears and the monastic asks him, "Friend, where do the Four Great Elements—earth, water, fire, air—cease without remainder?" The Great Brahma replies, "I am Brahma, Great Brahma, the Conqueror, the Unconquered, the All-seeing, All-Powerful, the Lord, the Maker and Creator, the Ruler, Appointer and Orderer, Father of All That Have Been and Shall Be."[127]

However, the Great Brahma is not answering the question! The monastic points this out. The Great Brahma merely repeats, machine-like, his declaration: "I am Brahma," etc. After one more try by the monastic, Brahma takes the monastic aside: "Monk, these devas believe there is nothing Brahma does not see, there is nothing he does not know, there is nothing he is unaware of. That is why I did not speak in front of them. But, monk, I don't know where the four great elements cease without remainder."[128]

The Great Brahma is the Wizard of Oz! He does not know where the four great elements cease without remainder. God is not omniscient. The back-story to God's ignorance is told in another sutta, which we will defer until then.

The Great Brahma then reprimands the monastic for going behind the Buddha's back: "you have acted incorrectly by going beyond the Blessed Lord, and going in search of an answer to this

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[126] D 11.80. Cf. the UFO phenomenon.
[127] D 11.81.
[128] D 11.83.

question elsewhere. Now, monk, you just go to the Blessed Lord, and put this question to him, and whatever answer he gives, accept it."[129] So stepping into the vortex once again, the monastic appears before the Buddha and asks him the question.

The Buddha compares the monastic to a land-sighting bird. A land-sighting bird, like Noah's dove, returns to the ship if it does not first find land. Similarly, the monastic returns to the Buddha in search of an answer to their question. It seems that another story has been inserted into the sutta, and in the process, the first part of the story—when the monastic was first with the Buddha—implied but never told, has been omitted. Perhaps we will find it in another sutta. Perhaps the Buddha is refusing to answer the monastic's question, which, the Buddha says, is wrongly put.

It is not that the four great elements cease, but that they find no footing. The Buddha frames this as a "place" where duality is destroyed. The Buddha's reply sounds almost like the riddle of the sphinx:[130]

> Where do earth, water, fire, and air no footing find?
> Where are long and short, small and great, fair and foul—
> Where are 'name and form' wholly destroyed? (85)

The binary unity of name and form, *namarupa,* the psychosomatic complex (subject and object), sometimes translated "mind and matter," itself dual and trans-dual, refers to the Five Aggregates as well as the *nidana*s of the chain of interdependent origination (*paticcasamuppada*).[131]

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[129] Ibid.

[130] "It was said in late lore that Hera or Ares sent the Sphinx from her Ethiopian homeland (the Greeks always remembered the foreign origin of the Sphinx) to Thebes in Greece where she asks all passersby the most famous riddle in history: 'Which creature has one voice and yet becomes four-footed and two-footed and three-footed?' She strangled and devoured anyone unable to answer." (Wikipedia, s.v. Sphinx)

[131] Pali *paticca,* 'following from anything as a necessary result' + *sam,* 'together' + *pada,* 'cause.' At least twelve English translations have been proposed, none of

Therefore, *namarupa* is destroyed by the realization of the trans-dual. The four great elements, which arise out of the interdependent unity of name and form, are sensory-cognitive modes and, as such, essentially dual in character, as is reason itself. The cessation of the four great elements suggests a physical place, whereas the Buddha's answer pertains to mind, specifically, the transcendence of dualistic rational sense-bound consciousness. Therefore, the answer is "in the mind," but even this is false if one objectifies the mind, for the mind is not an "object." *The mind, properly understood, is the precondition of all objectification:*

> Where consciousness is signless (*anidassinam*), boundless, all-luminous (*pabham*),
> That's where earth, fire, water and air find no footing,
> There both long and short, small and great, fair and foul—
> There 'name and form' are wholly destroyed.
> With the cessation of consciousness, this is all destroyed. (ibid)

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which have less than six syllables. There are already two English words that have approximately this meaning: 'codetermination' and 'coproduction.' The essential meaning of the phrase is that cause and effect are mutually involved—there is no effect without a cause; there is no cause without an effect. Therefore, they are the same. The extensive unity of cause and effect is *paticcasamuppada.* From this various inferences follow, including the beginninglessness of samsara, the 'now,' nonlocality, trans-duality, and emptiness. The term also refers to a specific 'chain' (*nidana*) of twelve causes/effects that reveals the underlying processes of samsara as essential, though illusory, aspects of reality. Although the "wheel" of samsara (cf. the wheel of dharma) seems to represent a closed system, two causes are subject to will or intentionality, i.e., ignorance (*avijja*), the root of the whole system, and craving (*tanha*), resulting in two paths to transcendence—the primary path of wisdom, corresponding to ignorance, and the secondary path of dispassion, corresponding to desirous attachment. The former is the path of the bodhisattva, which leads to buddhahood, whose pre-eminent quality is compassionate wisdom, the latter the path of the stream entrant (*sotapanna*), which leads to arhantship, whose pre-eminent quality is wise dispassion, though, like *namarupa,* the two attainments are inextricably intertwined.

The Buddha's reference to "both long and short, small and great, fair and foul" reminds one of chapter 2 of Laozi's Tao Te Ching:

> Being and non-being give rise to each other,
> difficult and easy complete each other,
> long and short define each other,
> high and low incline toward each other,
> tones and sounds harmonize,
> before and after follow each other. (2)

Trans-dual consciousness has three qualities:

- Signlessness;
- Boundlessness; and
- All-luminosity.

The first quality is *anidassinam* in Pali. It refers to the invisible or the unseen. All-luminosity is Pali *pabham. Pabham* means 'radiant' (*pa* implies direction, hence, the vector or ray). Walshe gives an alternative form of this word that presumably appears in some editions of the Pali Canon: *paham. Paham* is obscure and may mean the steps leading down into the cleansing water (of nirvana) or even 'abandonment.' Although Buddhaghosa favours the latter interpretation, Walshe prefers the former.

These three characteristics also suggest the tripartite *Ein* in the Cabalistic diagram of the Tree of Life, which constitutes the basis of the metaphysical system of the Western esoteric tradition: *Ein* ('Nothing'), *Ein Sof* ('Without Limit'), and *Ein Sof Ohr* (or *Ohr Ein Sof,* 'Light Without Limit'). Kevaddha delights and rejoices in these words of the Buddha, his answer found, his riddle solved.

Discourse to Lohicca

Digha Nikaya 12

Country: Kosala
Locale: Salavatika
Speakers: Lohicca, Bhesika, the Buddha

The location of this sutta is Salavatika, where the Buddha stayed during a tour of Kosala, accompanied by a large entourage. It is described as a prosperous place and is run by (Access to Insight has "reigned over") the Brahman Lohicca, who had been given the town by King Pasenadi.

Lohicca is obsessed by the thought that altruism, as we would term it, is unskilled and an expression of attachment, "for what can one man do for another."[132] Therefore, whatever good[133] one gains, in the largest sense of wealth, possessions, property, knowledge, truth, expertise, etc.—in short, everything of value that one can take for oneself—should be kept to, for, and by oneself, giving nothing to and sharing nothing with others. This ethical philosophy of selfishness has enjoyed something of a renascence in "latter-day" capitalism in such ideologies as social Darwinism, capitalism,

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[132] D 12.2.

[133] The Pali phrase that Walshe translates as 'good doctrine' is *kusalam dhammam*. From the examples that the Buddha gives—enjoying the entire fruit and revenues, not giving anything away to others, not being solicitous of their welfare, being uncompassionate—it is clear that the implication of *kusalam dhammam* extends far beyond doctrine. The word *dhamma* has a wide range of meanings, including (according to the PED) 'thing,' while the basic meaning of *kusala* is 'productive of merit' (i.e., value). Therefore, a *kusalam dhammam* is a 'valuable thing.'

libertarianism, neo-conservatism, neo-liberalism, objectivism, etc. Lohicca, however, must also have some doubts, for he seeks out the Buddha's opinion by inviting him to breakfast with him through his friend,[134] the barber Bhesika. Bhesika tells the Buddha about the "evil thought" of Lohicca. Despite Lohicca's evil thought, he has sufficient reverence for the Buddha to serve him choice foods himself. The sutta tells us that Lohicca sits to one side of the Buddha on a low stool.

The Buddha asks Lohicca if what he has heard is true, that Lohicca has developed such an evil argument. Lohicca admits it. Therefore, the Buddha asks him, "if anyone should say, 'The Brahman Lohicca resides at Salavatika, and he should enjoy the entire fruits and revenues of Salavatika, not giving anything away to others'—would not anyone who spoke like that be a source of danger to your tenants?"[135] Lohicca agrees that such a person would be dangerous. Thus, the Buddha takes Lohicca through a progression of ideas, beginning with being a source of danger, and segueing through not being solicitous of their welfare, a heart full of hatred, wrong view, and rebirth.

Finally, the Buddha declares that wrong view leads to an evil rebirth (*nirayam va tiracchanayonim va*). Walshe conventionally translates this as "hell or an animal rebirth," noting, however, that "it is doubtful whether either term originally meant what it was later taken to mean,"[136] referring, I assume, to the objectification of hell (*niraya*) and animal (*tiracchana).* "Rebirth" is the Pali word *yoni.*

The first thing to note here generally is that the Buddhist concept of "hell" differs significantly from the Abrahamic concept. As is

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[134]The term 'friend' (*avuso,* 'friend,' 'brother') was also used in the sangha during the Buddha's lifetime, but was changed to "Lord" or "Venerable Sir" (when referring to a monastic of greater seniority, or to any monk when a nun) after the Buddha's passing (*parinibbana*). The term seems to be a conventional mode of polite address, as among the Quakers, or the use of "comrade" by communists.

[135] D 12.11.

[136] Walshe, *Long Discourses,* p. 558, n. 244.

often the case, using a Judaeo-Christian English word to translate a Buddhist concept is misleading for an English reader, with all he historical connotations that the use of such words implies. We encounter this problem repeatedly in many English translations of the Pali Canon, even including modern ones.

Second, as Walshe points out, in the Pali Canon the concept of "hell" is far less hellish than in later Buddhist iconography (a similar phenomenon occurs in Christianity). For example, in the Angulimala Sutta, being beaten up by a small crowd is equated with "many thousands of years" in hell.[137] This relates to other references of the Buddha to the efficacy of the dharma. *Nirayan* is equivalent to Vedic *nirrti,* 'adversity,' 'dissolution,' 'bottom or lower depths of the earth,' 'evil,' 'calamity,' 'destruction,' 'death or the genius of death.'

Tiracchana only means 'animal' by implication. Literally, it means 'not erect.' Finally, *yoni* is a word rich in significance in Indian spirituality and refers to the 'womb.' Therefore, a better translation of this sentence might be "Truly, Lohicca, I declare that (this) groundless opinion dooms one to one of two rebirths—to be born in a wretched or a brutish state" *(micchaditthissa kho aham lohicca dvinnam gatinam annataram gatim vadami nirayam va tiracchanayonim va*). Walshe's concern for modern sensitivities notwithstanding, it is clear from the Pali Canon that the Buddha sees all of sentience as a universal continuum that includes five or six classes of rebirth; this implies that any one class may be reborn as any other class, either ascending or descending, so "hell-beings" and animals are obviously included. Anyone with a pet will understand this perfectly, and this doctrine provides a logical basis for the ethical prohibition against cruelty to animals, which is not always the case and which has little logical basis otherwise. *Providing a logical, which is to say, an ontological, basis for ethics (i.e., the Law of Karma) is one of the great contributions of the Buddha to moral philosophy.*

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[137] M 86.17.

Incidentally, "hell-beings" is a poor term to describe an inhabitant of the Buddhist purgatories, but what is the English word for an inhabitant of purgatory? I am not sure English has a precise alternative. Nevertheless, they are a distinct class of being, separate from anti-gods, humans, and ghosts, who suffer intensely as their bad karma ripens; they are reborn in temporary states of enormous suffering and woe, through which they purge themselves of bad karma and, when good qualities preponderate, they may be reborn as devas or even as people.

The Buddhist hells have such charming names as "burst blister," "shivering," "lamentation" "chattering teeth," "black thread," "crushing," "great screaming," and "great heating." Others sound less threatening, such as "lotus," "reviving," and "uninterrupted." The lotus *naraka* is so cold that it makes the skin turn blue (like a lotus) and crack. The "reviving" *naraka* has ground made of molten iron. Inhabitants of the "uninterrupted" *naraka* are roasted in an oven for $339{,}738{,}624 \times 10^{10}$ years! Despite these names and enormous durations, the doctrine of karma requires proportionality, in which effects are proportional to causes and good and bad effects precisely cancel each other out, so that each rebirth is precisely calibrated to the net karmic quality at the moment of death. Although people do not usually remember their past lives, devas, ghosts, and hell-beings seem to. Since it seems doubtful that animals remember their past lives, this places humans closer to the animals in terms of conscious development, despite our arrogant belief otherwise. The Buddhist view regarding the closeness of humans and animals is in striking contrast to the Abrahamic religious world-view, in which angels (*devas*) and humans reflect the Godhead but animals and the earth itself exist only as objects to be used by humans, and so are inherently soulless; the Buddhist view is oddly compatible with the doctrine of biological evolution!

Walshe notes that the Buddha declares non-belief in the doctrine of rewards and punishments for moral and immoral deeds respectively to be particularly reprehensible. Thus, the Buddha equates Lohicca's doctrine of active self-interest ("discovers some good dharma") as equivalent to immoralism itself.

The Buddha clearly sees the outcome of such a system, when one or another actor has taken up all the available goods. In a scenario in which every actor seeks only their own good and no one else's, and seeks to maximize and retain as much good as they can for themselves, without regard for any other consideration—a system that today we would call laisse-faire ("free market") capitalism—such a system will fall into increasing competition for the diminishing quantity of good that is still available, until the only good that is available is the good of others. At this point, all the actors will prey upon each other with increasing ferocity until only one actor remains, through a process of vicious struggle. Thus, capitalism leads to increasingly tyrannical monopolies until eventually we are left with a global dictatorship ("new world order"), in which the arbitrary desire and self-interest of a few determines the whole system of social order. As we now know, such a system also destroys the natural environment, and is thus inherently nihilistic. We see the effects of this phenomenon most clearly today in the United States of America.

At this point the Buddha neatly segues from a discussion of a wrong teaching (Lohicca's evil argument) to a discussion of wrong teachers. The Buddha identifies three types of blameworthy teacher:

- A teacher who has not attained the goal of asceticism, and their disciples do not listen to them;
- A teacher who has not attained the goal of asceticism, but their disciples listen to them; and
- A teacher who has attained the goal of asceticism, but their disciples do not listen to them.

The fourth teacher is the blameless one who has attained the goal of asceticism and their disciples listen to them. The Tathagata is the supreme example of this.

Lohicca sees the error of his ways, and immediately takes Refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. The reference to "as long as life shall last" shows that the ideal expectation is that one

does not leave the Buddhist order. This is also true of the monastic order, though the Vinaya provides a way for the monastic to withdraw without dishonouring themselves should they choose to do so.

The Threefold Knowledge

Digha Nikaya 13

Country: Kosala
Locale: Manasakata
Speakers: Vasettha, Bharadvaja, the Buddha

A stute students may recognize two English words in the title of this sutta. Pali *te* is 'three' (or 'threefold'), whereas *vijja* clearly is 'vision' or, more properly 'knowledge' or 'wisdom.' Thus, Walshe translates this as the 'sutta of the threefold knowledge,' the opposite of *avijja,* 'ignorance' or 'not knowing' ('no vision'), but with an ironic twist, as we shall see.

Manasakata is the name of a village south of the river Achiravati, now called the river Rapti. The name means 'mind-begotten' (*manasa* + *kata*). Shravasti (Savatthi) is also located on the bank of this river, located in mid-southern Nepal. The Buddha stayed at a mango grove on the bank of this river.

A number of Brahmans are staying in the town, described as rich and famous. One of these, Todeyya, is the father of Subha, who asked Ananda after the *parinibbana* to explain to him the things that the Buddha praised and dispraised in the Subha Sutta.[138]

Two young Brahmans, Vasettha and Bharadvaja, begin to argue between themselves while walking along the road about right and

[138] D 10.

wrong paths leading to Union with Brahma. Vasettha advocates the philosophy of the Brahman Pokkharasati, while Bharadvaja defends Tarukkha.

Pokkharasati is the Brahman in the Ambattha Sutta,[139] whose student insults the Buddha. The two youths cannot agree on whose teacher is right, each believing that their teacher alone is true. They agree to take the question to the Buddha, who is in the area, and to abide by his decision as arbiter. That they would do this at all tells you something about the Buddha's reputation and attitude.

The two complain to the Buddha about how many different paths there are, in the course of which they name five Brahmanic schools: the Adhariyans, Tittiriyans, Chandokans, Chandavans, and the Brahmacariyans (or Bavharijans). Walshe describes the first four as Vedic priests who relied on liturgy, sacrifice, or chant, contrasted with some ascetics who practised chastity. We can see the word 'chanter' in Chandoka (Chandoga) and 'chastity' in Brahmacariya. Tittiriya (Taittiriya) means 'pupils of the Taittiriyans.' A better Sanskritist than I might be able to cast further light on the meaning of these words.

Rather than choose one, the Buddha asks Vasettha whether any of these Brahmans, their ancestors, or even the rishis, the original makers and expounders of the mantras, ever saw Brahma face-to-face (compare the Biblical tradition of seeing God face to face). The Buddha names ten such rishis. This list also occurs in the Vinaya Pitaka.[140] In the latter, the Buddha declares that the true Veda was revealed to the rishis, but subsequently distorted by priestcraft. Clearly, the Buddha has great respect for the ancient Indian tradition and its antecedents but sees Brahmanism as a decadent remnant of the original spiritual tradition. These are great rishis, including six of the Seven Sages (Saptarishi) of Ursa Major, consisting of seven bright stars that point to the Pole Star or Axis Mundi. Interestingly, the Buddha's *parinibbana* occurred just about one Ursa

[139] D 3.
[140] Mahavagga, 1.245.

Major cycle (2,700 years) after the traditional date of the advent of the Kali Yuga, which puts his passing in 402 BCE.[141] The Seven Sages composed different parts of the Vedas as well as other things.

Vessamitta (Vessamitto, Vishvamitra): Formerly a king, Vessamitta is venerated as a great and powerful rishi of ancient India, and the discoverer of the Gayatri mantra. The Gayatri mantra is a Vedic Sanskrit poem from the Rigveda (3.62.10). It is associated with Savitr; thus, it is called the Savitr mantra. Literally 'impeller,' 'rouser,' 'vivifier,' Savitr is the son of Aditi, the mother of the gods and the twelve signs of the zodiac. Savitr is also associated with the vivifying influence of Surya, the sun, just before sunrise.

[Om bhur bhuvah svah]
tat savitur varen(i)yam
bhargo devasya dhimahi
dhiyo yo nah prachodayat

Vivekananda translates this as "We meditate on the glory of that Being who has produced this universe; may He enlighten our minds."[142]

Yamataggi (Jamadagni, Jamdagni): One of the Seven Sages and a descendant of Bhrigu.

Angirasa (Angiras, Angiraso): Another of the Seven Sages, the reputed father of the ancestors of humanity, he is also credited as being a direct ancestor of the Buddha. He is said to have been born out of the divine intellect of Brahma. Brahma assigns him the task of caring for the welfare of Brahma's creation.

Bharadvaja* (Bharadwaja, Bharadwajo): A descendant of Angirasa and one of the Seven Sages, renowned for his scholarship

[141] I proposed that this year be adopted as An 0 of a Universal Buddhist Epoch (UBE) to replace the discredited Theravadin Buddhist era (BE) of 544/545 BCE. Richard Gombrich puts the *parinibbana* in about 404 BCE.

[142] *Raja Yoga,* p. 89.

and meditative attainments, including egolessness. Reputed author of the Ayurveda.

Vasettha* (Vasistha, Vassettho): Another of the Seven Sages, he is supposed to have authored a book on the Vedic system of electional astrology.

Kassapa (Kassapo): Another of the Seven Sages.

Bhagu (Bhrigu): Another of the Seven Sages, inventor of predictive astrology. Krishna compares Bhagu to the "opulence of God" (Bhagavad Gita).

* NOTE: Presumably, the coincidence of names means nothing more than that the Brahmans are named after those rishis.

Six of these rishis belong to the Seven Sages, but it is impossible to say who the missing rishi is, since different lists exist, none of which corresponds to the Buddhist list exactly. There are at least eleven possible candidates, one of whom, interestingly, is named Gautama. Walshe describes these as the ten rishi authors of the Vedic mantras.

The rishis, whose number included both men and women, were shamanic seers whose utterance inspired the Vedas, which were then recited orally from generation to generation. The rishis were enlightened householders, married with descendants. When recited aloud, their verses invoke the devas. It is reasonable to suppose that the hymns of the Rigveda were inspired by the devas when the rishis entered into ecstatic trance states. A similar cult is associated with the *ayahuasqueros* of Peru. The rishis understood the art of travelling in a mental body, which involved the creation of an imaginal mind-body and its projection into higher dimensions of reality, with which they conversed with the devas and manifested their wisdom, power, and beauty in the form of song. Vivekananda calls them "seers of thought." Even these divinely inspired seers had not seen Brahma face to face.

Therefore, the Buddha declares, the entire Vedic Brahmanic conceit is ill founded, because it is speculative, not based on experience. The Buddha declares the Brahmans to be like the blind

leading the blind: "The talk of these Brahmans learned in the Three Vedas turns out to be laughable, mere words empty and vain."[143]

Vasettha agrees with the Buddha that the Brahmans see the sun and the moon just like everybody else and that, though they may pray, sing praises to, and worship the sun and the moon, this does not mean that they know the path to unite with the sun and the moon. We know that even the brahmas cannot predict when, how, or where Brahma would appear; thus, neither did the rishis nor the Brahmans know this, nor do they know the way to Union with Brahma.

The Buddha compares the Brahmans, rather ludicrously, to a young man searching for the perfect girl, without knowing when, how, or where he will find her or even what she looks like; someone building a staircase at a crossroads; or trying to cross a raging river by beckoning to the other side.

Moreover, he says, the Brahmans neglect what they should do and do what they should not do. The Buddha frequently criticizes the Brahmans for self-indulgence and general laxness. The Buddha also rejects the method of deva invocation (including prayer) to attain Union with Brahma. Thus, the Buddha rejects the fundamental premise of theism. He says that the Brahmans are enslaved by the bonds and fetters of sense desires. In addition, they are hindered by sensuality, anger, sloth-torpor, restlessness-worry, and doubt, encumbered by wives, wealth, hatred, anger, impurity, and lack of discipline.

By comparison, the Buddha notes that Brahma is unencumbered by wives and wealth, hatred, anger, impurity, and lack of discipline. If one does not possess the characteristics of Brahma at death, then how can they be reborn as Brahma? The Law of Karma forbids it: "Therefore their threefold knowledge is called the threefold desert, the threefold wilderness, the threefold destruction."[144]

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[143] D 13.15.
[144] D 13.36.

The Brahman Vasettha's rather unlikely response is that he has heard that the Buddha knows the way to Union with Brahma. *The assertion that the Buddha has this reputation is itself interesting.* When Vasettha tells the Buddha this, the Buddha says, "What do you think, Vasettha? Suppose there were a man here born and brought up in Manasakata, and somebody who had come from Manasakata and had missed the road should ask him the way. Would that man, born and bred in Manaskata, be in a state of confusion or perplexity."[145] Vasettha answers that they would not, because they know all the paths.

The implication is that the Buddha is one who knows all the paths. Elsewhere the Buddha compares the dharma to an overgrown path leading to the abandoned ruins of a long forgotten city in the midst of an ancient forest—perhaps a "mind-begotten" city? Moreover, the Buddha knows more than the Brahman speculators do. He himself travelled this path and knows the path of practice that leads to Union with Brahma.

Finally, the Buddha makes his point. The way to Union with Brahma, the Buddha says, consists in the attainment of three things: the practice of morality; the first meditative attainment; and the practice of metta meditation, the contemplation on compassion.

The Buddha describes this meditation thus:

> With his heart filled with loving kindness, he dwells suffusing one quarter, the second, third, the fourth. Thus he dwells suffusing the whole world, upwards, downwards, across, everywhere, always with a heart filled with loving kindness, abundant, unbounded, without hate or ill-will. ... Then with his heart filled with compassion, with sympathetic joy, with equanimity he dwells suffusing one quarter, the second, the third, the fourth. Thus he dwells suffusing the whole world, upward, downwards, across, everywhere, always with a heart

[145] D 13.37.

> filled with equanimity, abundant, unbounded, without hate or ill will. (76)[146]

In this doctrine of meditation on compassion leading to rebirth in the kingdom of the heaven of the brahmas, the Buddha is setting forth a teaching that would be echoed four hundred years later by Jesus, the great Hebrew bodhisattva of Galilee, along with many other elements of the dharma. Nevertheless, rebirth in the Brahma worlds is not the goal of dharma, which aims much higher. Indeed, dharma aims beyond anything that can be conceptualized, though, paradoxically, one must reach that point of transcendent realization through the cultivation of wisdom.

Interestingly, the Buddha adds this easily overlooked detail: "he leaves nothing untouched, nothing unaffected in the sensuous sphere. This, Vasettha, is the way to Union with Brahma."[147] This point corresponds to the Buddha's emphasis on *awareness of the body*.

The Buddha invites Vasettha to compare the qualities of Brahma with the qualities of the Buddhist monastic. Vasettha agrees that they possess identical qualities. Thus, the Buddha implies that it is the monastic that attains Union with Brahma. Vasettha and Bharadvaja take refuge as lay householders in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

This sutta is often interpreted as though the Buddha did not really mean it, that the whole sutta is an elaborate ruse to trick Vasettha and Bharadvaja into following the right path. Rather, the Buddha is revealing to Vasettha and Bharadvaja the inner meaning of their own premises. The Buddha is also revealing a way of religion suited to the Brahmans and lay followers, whereas the Buddha intimates that the monastics possess an even more subtle and profound interpretation that reveals the ancient and archaic heart of

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[146] Although metta is generally seen as a meditation on compassion, it is also a practice in calming the heart and expanding consciousness.

[147] D 13.79.

the dharma, long lost to and forgotten by the Brahmans whom he addressed and berated for their superficial character, not because he is opposed to Brahmanism as such, but rather because he is opposed to the orthodoxy of exotericism that had come to dominate the religion of the late Vedic period, characterized as it was by ritual, dogma, and prejudice. Against this, the Buddha posits the way of the rishis, whose religion was grounded in direct knowledge or gnosis based on immediate ecstatic experience.

SUMMARY OF THE MORALITIES

The Tevijja Sutta is the last sutta of the first division of the Digha Nikaya, entitled the Moralities. This collection of thirteen suttas is highly repetitive, referring repeatedly to various aspects of self-restraint, the meditative attainments, the insights, the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and nirvana. In addition to this exploration, we have gleaned many insights into the nature of the dharma. To conclude, I will briefly summarize what we learned in the course of discussing the first thirteen suttas.

The first thing we learn in the first sutta of the Sutta Pitaka is that the moral rules and regulations may impress people but are in themselves neither sufficient nor adequate to describe the Tathagata or to attain awakening or emancipation. Ethics and morality are "elementary and inferior." Thus, the Sutta Pitaka paradoxically begins with an extensive exploration of what the dharma is *not*. In particular, the dharma is not ethics or speculation. We are also introduced to the centrality of rationality in the spiritual quest. All speculative views are rejected because dualistic rationality cannot penetrate the mystery of dharma, which is transcendent, transrational, and trans-dual. *Realization is only attainable by direct intuitive experience*. Therefore, any view that can be conceptualized as a world is a trap that leads to rebirth in just that sort of world. True awakening is beyond all views and beyond rationality itself; thus, it is an uncharacterizable mystery.

In the second sutta we discover the fruits of the monastic life, which include four meditative attainments (the meditative

attainments), culminating in perfect insight; five psychic powers, culminating in the Divine Eye, wherewith one perceives the karma of others; and finally perfect awareness, awakening, and emancipation. *In addition, we learn of the centrality of the awareness of the body in Buddhist practice.*

In the third sutta, we learn that caste and race are irrelevant.

In the fourth sutta, we begin to see that the Buddha's dharma corresponds to the ancient Indian religion of which contemporary Brahmanism is merely a degenerate remnant, and that the true Brahman is the spiritual practitioner based on their spiritual qualities alone.

In the fifth sutta, we learn how the Buddha reinterprets Brahmanic ritualism in ethical and spiritual terms, and the Buddha's social and political philosophy, which today we would call social democracy.

In the sixth sutta, we see how Buddhist spirituality was practised and experienced, including the reality of altered states of consciousness and psychic powers. The Buddha also sets out the path of the arhant and alludes to the mind-stream and the intuition that the body is the objectification of sentience.

In the eighth sutta, the Buddha declares that the practices of asceticism are superficial, mechanical observances that can be done by anyone, but that *the true asceticism is an asceticism of the mind,* as well as ten criteria that establish the truth of the Buddha's speech.

In the ninth sutta, the Buddha asserts the absoluteness of the Law of Karma. Nothing that occurs is causeless, or fails to have its effect. Further, the Buddha sets out the whole process of awareness (beginning with controlled perception and leading through stages to the limit of perception and cessation). No worlds are exempt from suffering; thus, the attainment of emancipation transcends all worldly conceptions. There are three kinds of acquired self—gross, mental, and formless—corresponding to the three worlds of sensuality, form, and formlessness; body, speech, and mind; and the three bodies, *nirmanakaya, samboghakaya, and dharmakaya.*

In the tenth sutta, the Buddha discusses the Threefold Division of the Noble Eightfold Path; rejects religion in the common sense; and reiterates that morality is inadequate, that more needs to be done to attain awakening.

In the eleventh sutta, the Buddha declares that there are three types of miracle—psychic powers, telepathy, and the miracle of dharma teaching or instruction, which is the greatest miracle of all because it alone leads to emancipation. The first category of miracle includes such powers as self-replication, invisibility, passing through matter, etc. Although these powers are only exceptionally witnessed in this world, interestingly, they are normally experienced in three contexts: in dreams, the psychedelic experience, and the UFO phenomenon. It stretches credulity to suggest that this association is accidental. The miracle of teaching relates to the Power of Truth. We also see that meditative concentration (*samadhi*) can be used to gain access to the deva worlds to obtain insights, and that God is a fraud. Finally, trans-dual consciousness, where material forms find no footing, is characterized by signlessness, boundlessness, and all-luminosity, similar to the Cabalistic trinity of *Ein, Ein Sof,* and *Ein Sof Or*.

In the twelfth sutta, the Buddha rejects the philosophy of egoism and advocates a philosophy of social responsibility based on altruism.

Finally, in the thirteenth sutta, the Buddha declares that the true Veda was revealed by the rishis, male and female shamans and married householders, whose spirituality is grounded in ecstatic experience, unlike the Brahmans who no longer have any connection to experiential spirituality, but rely on liturgy, sacrifice, and chant. Rishi spirituality is based on the soma sacrifice, which originally consisted in consuming a mind-altering sacrament, not unlike the *ayahuasca* cult of Peru. The Buddha also reveals the way to Union with Brahma, which consists of self-control, meditative attainment, and meditation on compassion (*metta*) directed toward the whole sensual creation and all created beings, and declares with Jesus that only one who is like Brahma will be reborn in the Brahma worlds.

The Great Division

The Great Lineage

Digha Nikaya 14

Country: Kosala
Locale: Kereri hutment, in Anathapindika's park in the Jeta Grove, Savatthi; Subhaga Grove, Ukkattha
Speaker: the Buddha

The Mahapadana Sutta is the first sutta of the second part of the Digha Nikaya, called the Great Division. Almost all the suttas in the Great Division have *maha* ('great') in the title, though three do not, and there are suttas outside of the Great Division that have *maha* in the title (only one in the Digha Nikaya, but many more in the Majjhima, once again indicating the curious organization of the Sutta Pitaka).

Although Walshe translates the sutta as the "Great Discourse on the Lineage," a more literal translation might be, "The Sutta of the Great Transmission" (lit. 'giving,' 'bestowing').

In this sutta, the Buddha is at Savatthi, in the Kareri hutment, which is located in Anthapindika's park in the Jeta Grove. We encountered Savatthi in the Potthapada Sutta,[148] where the Buddha discusses the "higher extinction of consciousness" with Potthapada.

A number of monastics gather in the late morning at the Kareri pavilion, after the daily meal, and are discussing past lives. The Buddha joins them and asks them what they are talking about. The Buddha gives the monastics a dharma talk on past lives. The

[148] D 9.

Buddha names eight buddhas who have appeared in the world in past ages, shown in the table that follows:

Past buddhas

Buddha	Time ago	Caste	Clan	Lifespan (years)
Vipassi	91 eons	Kshat-riya	Kon-danna	80,000
Sikhi	31 eons	Kshat-riya	Kon-danna	70,000
Vessabhu	31 eons (same as Sikhi)	Kshat-riya	Kon-danna	60,000
Kakusandha	Current eon	Brah-man	Kassapa	40,000
Konmaga-mana	Current eon	Brah-man	Kassapa	30,000
Kassapa	Current eon	Brah-man	Kassapa	20,000
Gotama	Current eon	Kshat-riya	Gotama	100

Interestingly, the inclusion of Gotama creates a slight predominance of kshatriya over Brahman buddhas, at least out of the most recent seven (there are many more). The lifespan of people at the time of Gotama is described as "short, limited and quick."[149]

This lack of longevity may have something to do with the nature of the Buddha Gotama's teaching, which (he says) is far more limited and narrowly focused than the whole dharma.[150]

The text goes on to describe the different trees under which all the different buddhas attain enlightenment; the names of each buddha's two noble disciples; the size of each one's sangha of arhants; the name of each one's personal attendant; the name of each one's mother and father; and the name of the royal capital. These names are not likely to mean much to us, except for our own Buddha, Gotama, so I append the list as it pertains to Gotama alone:

[149] D 14.1.7, 3.30.
[150] See S 56.31.

Tree: Assattha (*Ficus religiosa*)
Noble disciples: Sariputta, Moggallana
Number of arhants: 1,250
Personal attendant: Ananda
Father: Suddhodana ('pure rice or food')
Mother: Maya ('wondrous or magical power')
Capital: Kapilavastu

By comparison, the number of arhants of the previous buddhas ranges from 6.98 million to twenty thousand. Both the lifespans and the number of arhants fall in each subsequent eon. This expresses the doctrine of degeneration or, as we would say, the law of entropy, "the arrow of time," which is fundamental to the Buddhist conception of history.

The age to which the Buddha is referring seems to be the *antahkappa*, which is the time that it takes for people to descend from eighty thousand to ten years and back to eighty thousand years again. There is no need to take this literally in order to see that a period is implied. The extraordinary durations associated with Hindu and Buddhist *kalpas* seem to appear in the later literature. In this sutta, no rate is given that would allow us to calculate the duration of an *antahkappa*. However, it must be at least ninety thousand years, this being the sum of the ages of the first three buddhas of the current eon, but is certainly many multiples of that. Buddha births being rare occurrences, the previous buddhas are prehistoric, perhaps even non-terrestrial. We shall have occasion to return to this topic in connection with a later sutta, in which a rate of progression is implied.[151]

At this point, the Buddha goes for his afternoon siesta, during which it is his custom either to nap or to meditate, whereupon the monastics fall into an ongoing discussion of whether the Buddha obtained this knowledge because of his own realization or

[151] See D 23.11. Cf. Kato et al., *The Threefold Lotus Sutra,* p. 376, s.v. Kalpa, where it is given as one year per century.

communication with devas. After the rest period, perhaps mid-afternoon, the Buddha returns to the pavilion and again asks the monastics what they are discussing.

The Buddha's response is extremely informative. He tells them that this knowledge comes both from his own "penetration of the principles of dhamma"[152] and from the devas, implying not only memory of past lives, but also communication with spiritual beings. In the Burmese and Thai editions of the Pali Canon, the Buddha's communication with devas is reiterated. The latter appears almost as a vindication of the former, and suggests the poetic deva invocations of the rishi shamans. Similarly, "spirit communications" become part of a hybrid Buddhist-Taoist canon (e.g., the Qingjing Jing of Ge Xuan in the Lingbao tradition). Unlike the ecstatic mythopoeia of the rishis, however, the Taoist spirit writings are metaphysical in character, more like the "penetration of the principles of dharma" to which the Buddha refers.

Having set forth the path of the arhant in sutta 6, here the Buddha sets out the path of the bodhisattva. As Bhikku Bodhi acknowledges, the doctrine of the bodhisattva is logically presupposed by the doctrine of the arhant, implicit in the doctrine of buddhahood, and yet remains in the background of the Pali Canon.[153]

The Buddha proceeds to identify sixteen rules (*dhammata*) regarding the appearance of these great beings of which he himself is one:

1. Bodhisattvas are reborn from the Tusita plane in their mother's womb.
2. At their conception, an immeasurable, splendid light-energy-information wave manifests everywhere in the multiverse and beyond, creating a great evolutionary temporal vibration.
3. Four protective devas of the four quarters appear.
4. The Bodhisattva's mother becomes spontaneously virtuous.

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[152] D 14.1.15.
[153] "Arahants, Bodhisattvas and Buddhas."

5. The Bodhisattva's mother becomes spontaneously pure.
6. She delights in the five senses, but without any taint of sensuality.
7. The mother of the Bodhisattva has no sickness (associated with gestation) and experiences the Bodhisattva in her womb.
8. The mother of the Bodhisattva dies seven days after his birth and is reborn in the Tusita plane.
9. The term of the mother of the Bodhisattva's gestation is exactly ten (lunar) months (= 295 days).
10. She gives birth standing up.
11. When the Bodhisattva is born, devas welcome him first, followed by humans.
12. When he is born, the Bodhisattva does not touch the earth.
13. When he is born, the Bodhisattva is not defiled by anything impure.
14. Two streams of warm and cold water bathe them both.
15. The newborn Bodhisattva faces north, takes seven steps under a white sunshade, scans the four quarters, and then declares, with a voice like a bull, "I am chief in the world, supreme in the world, eldest in the world. This is my last birth; there will be no more re-becoming."[154]
16. At his birth, the immeasurable, splendid light-energy wave again manifests everywhere in the multiverse and beyond, as in #2.

The Tusita (lit. 'contented') plane is the home of the Bodhisattva prior to their final rebirth as a person. Their conception initiates a negentropic information wave that radiates out indefinitely in all directions from the point of origin, creating a dharmic "world-age." Buddhas are being born all the time in different places in the universe, so the universe is pervaded by the intersection patterns of such waves. These are the places where spiritual civilizations arise.

[154] D 14.1.29.

We see this in the generalized evolutionary tendency that occurs within a dominant overall devolutionary, involutionary, or entropic tendency, the so-called ascending and descending arcs.

The sixth point, that the mother of the Buddha rejoices in the creation, complements the Buddha's emphasis on metta meditation, love, and awareness of the body, discussed in connection with the previous sutta. Similarly, the Joyful plane is the penultimate home of the Bodhisattva, who also has healing powers. The Bodhisattva is clearly associated with a luminous, vitalistic, energetic, negentropic, spiritual dynamic, distinct from the arhant, which implies the appearance of an evolutionary arc within the overarching devolutionary cycle, whereas the arhant simply vanishes, thus effectively accelerating the devolutionary arc and undermining the dharmic expansion. Arhants and buddhas are not ontologically equivalent.

In gesturing toward the North, the infant Bodhisattva identifies himself with the North or Pole Star, the chief star, supreme above the world, which represents the summit or zenith of the world mountain, the axis mundi, the point of transcendence.

In his commentary on the Digha Nikaya, Buddhaghosa takes all of this symbolically. Standing on the earth represents the Four Roads to Power. Facing north refers to the multitude to be won over. The seven steps symbolize the seven factors of enlightenment. The sunshade is liberation. Looking about refers to knowledge without obstruction. The voice of the bull represents the turning of the wheel. In declaring his last birth, he proclaims the future fact of his arhantship.

The Buddha tells the story of Prince Vipassi, the first buddha in this list who flourished ninety-one eons ago. Essentially, this is the story of the Buddha retold, including:

- The examination of the child by the Brahmans skilled in signs;
- The thirty-two marks of a great man;
- The prophecy regarding becoming a World Ruler or a World Teacher, a Buddha;

- Being raised in pleasure, including living in the female palace during the rainy season, surrounded by female musicians;
- The Four Sights: an old person, a sick person, a corpse, and a 'renunciate' (*pabbajita*);
- Going forth into the homeless state;
- The realization of interdependent origination;
- The realization of the inherent duality of name-form (mind-matter), and the mutually dependent duality of form-matter and consciousness;
- The realization of the origin of suffering or angst (*dukkha*);
- The realization of transience, culminating in freedom from the corruptions without remainder;
- The realization of Cessation;
- The decision to teach as a result of the meritorious action of of "God" (Sahampati);
- The teaching of the preparatory path of religion and the path of dharma proper;
- The creation of the sangha;
- The dharma transmission (sending forth the monastics for six years);
- The recitation of the Vinaya at the end of six years.

Since the Vinaya developed over time as a body of tradition built up in response to actual situations, this was presumably the time during which this process occurred. Thus, we may say then that the original codification of the Vinaya took place when the Buddha was 41.[155]

Vipassi realizes that he has rediscovered the **insight way to enlightenment.** Insight or wisdom is the corollary of ignorance (*avijja*). The word "insight" refers to *vipassana,* and corresponds

[155] This proves that the Vinaya is not an essential aspect of spiritual development as such, or the Buddha would have instituted it immediately after his Enlightenment. People became arhants before the Vinaya existed. Mahakassapa implies as much.

to *jhana* in Sanskrit. The reference to "unblinking concentration" comes from the same root. This identifies the Buddha as a jhana yogi. **Buddhism is pre-eminently a Way of Wisdom.** This is clear in the Pali Canon as well as in the Mahayana Prajna-paramita literature.

INTERDEPENDENT ORIGINATION

The version of interdependent origination presented in the Digha Nikaya[156] consists of ten *nidanas,* rooted in the mutually dependent duality of form-matter (*namarupa*) and consciousness (*vinnana*). This differs from the full twelvefold version that one finds, for example, in M 38.[157] As previously discussed, the essential meaning of *paticcasamuppada*, is 'everything arising from causes.' This word implies the absoluteness of the Law of Karma, i.e., that every cause produces an effect and that every effect arises from a cause, from which we may deduce the beginninglessness of samsara, the innate tendency of reality to differentiation (proliferation), the universal intervolution of phenomena, the complementarity of mental and material causes,[158] and the efficacy of volition or intention (the Power or Act of Truth).

In addition to the universal principle of interdependent origination itself, the word alludes to a specific chain of connected causes and effects from which the Buddha deduces both angst and its cure; the peculiar bidirectionality of cause and effect, one entropic and one negentropic; as well as revealing the two "weak links" in the chain that lead to the interrelated paths of wisdom and

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[156] D 14, 15.

[157] The "complete" version includes ignorance (*avijja*) and the karmic potentials (*sankharas*) as two causes anterior to mind-body-consciousness, making not-knowing (unconsciousness) the ultimate root cause of the entire process, and therefore the primary attribute of reality. Elsewhere, the abstract principle of 'proliferation' (*papanca*) is recognized as even more fundamental than ignorance.

[158] Cf. the Dalai Lama, "Statement of the Dalai Lama on the Issue of His Reincarnation."

renunciation, and the primacy of mind-body-consciousness. This chain can be shown in a diagram:

The chain of causes and effects

	English	Pali
1.	Consciousness	*Vinnana*
2.	Name-form	*Namarupa*
3.	Sense bases	*Salayatana*
4.	Contact	*Phassa*
5.	Feeling	*Vedana*
6.	Craving	*Tanha*
7.	Clinging	*Upadana*
8.	Karmic becoming	*Kammabhava*
9.	Birth	*Jati*
10.	Ageing and death	*Jaramarana*

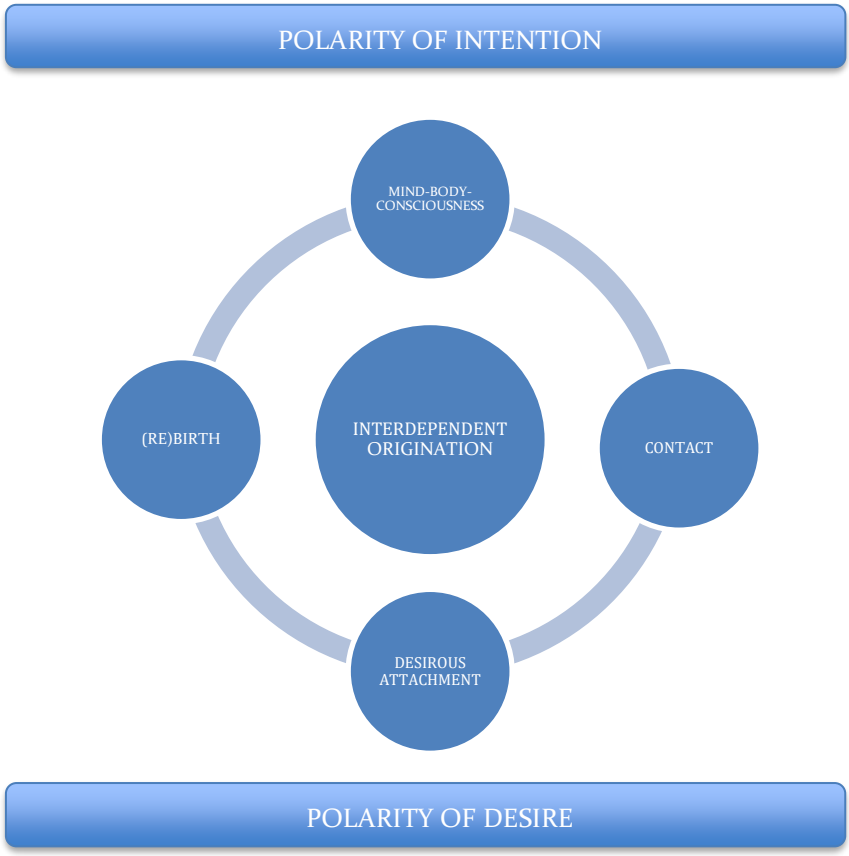
In this analysis, which may be older, mind and body (a.k.a. name and form, *namarupa*) and consciousness is a mutually interdependent dyad that underlies the whole system. Thus, beginning with what he knows, "the whole mass of suffering," the Buddha works his way, "backwards," as it were, through a series of causes and effects, through birth and becoming, clinging and craving, feeling and contact, the six sense faculties (Buddhism counts the mind or brain as a sensory organ), and finally consciousness and the psychosomatic complex, the primary dyad of mind and matter.

Nama refers to the psychological elements of the human person, which together with *rupa* constitute the psychosomatic individual consisting of the Five Aggregates (introduced in D 22.14), i.e., form (*rupa*), feeling (*vedana*), perception (*sanna*), volitional formations (*sankhara*), and consciousness (*vinnana*). *Vinnana* also refers specifically to the life force of the body as well as the discerning mind.

The list also exhibits the property of bidirectionality. If we begin with mind-body-consciousness, we can trace the progressive development of the person culminating in birth, ageing, and death; sorrow; lamentation; pain; grief; and distress. It is the Buddha's

discovery that, since everything is transient, emancipation from causality itself is possible. Thus, the perpetuating process itself can be transformed into a "ceasing" process that leads to emancipation. We would call this the "arrow of time," with its two aspects, entropy (following the order of nature) and negentropy (which results from the introduction of reflexive self-consciousness).

Not all effects are equal, however. Some fall outside the direct control of the volition due to the inertia of karma, itself the result of previous volitions. Thus, we cannot simply transform our ageing process, death, birth, becoming, or our bodily form. Killing the body, for example, which arose as a heresy during the Buddha's lifetime, and which is still found in some Buddhist sects today, does not disrupt the continuity of cause and effect at all, but merely adds the karma of killing to one's karmic legacy. However, there are two "weak links" in this chain—the clinging-craving dynamic, which defines the polarity of desirous attachment, and the essence of the mind-body-consciousness dynamic itself, identical with the formations (*sankhara*), at the heart of which is intention (*cetana*), for it is through volitional intention that we create the karmic tendencies or predispositions. Both are overcome by giving up desirous attachment through the concentration of and on consciousness, i.e., through reflexivity. This causes us to see reality, realizing the essentially unsatisfactory nature of becoming, and thus abandoning it once we recognize that it is the source of our angst, since the desire for happiness is innate. Thus, through the practice of renunciation, consisting of morality or virtuous self-control, and through the cultivation of wisdom or gnosis one can disrupt and transcend the binding fetter of interdependent origination. This diagram can also be expressed as a quaternary.



The Buddha also applies the principle of interdependent origination to an analysis of the origin of private property and government.[159]

Embedded within the *nidanas* is another set of principles, called the Five Aggregates of Grasping. It is through the contemplation of the rise and fall, appearance and disappearance, i.e., the transience, of the Five Aggregates that Vipassi attains emancipation. The Five Aggregates are **form, feeling, perception, mental formations,** and **consciousness.**

[159] See D 15, 27.

The five aggregates of grasping

	English	Pali
1.	Form	*Rupa*
2.	Feeling	*Vedana*
3.	Perception	*Sanna*
4.	Volitional formations	*Sankhara*
5.	Consciousness	*Vinnana*

One can see that the Five Aggregates and the tenfold chain of interdependent origination overlap: *rupa* (included in *namarupa*), *vedana,* and *vinnana.*

Vipassi concludes by identifying the path with self-control (morality) and mental self-purification (meditation) through the cultivation of wisdom.

We must not make the mistake that Vipassi is the "first Buddha," though he is the first buddha to whom Gotama refers. Vipassi himself says, "This the Buddhas teach."[160] Presumably, Vipassi has his own list. Such lists of buddhas are merely lists of specific lineages, not all the buddhas who ever were. So Gotama's lineage originates with Vipassi, who establishes the paradigm for all future buddhas in that buddha lineage. Logically, since samsara is infinite, there must be infinite numbers of buddhas.

To this point, the narration of the sutta has been continuous. Now, however, it seems that a completely different narrative has been spliced into this sutta. In this narrative, the Buddha is staying at a different place, Ukkattha, in the Subhaga Grove, sitting alone

[160]D 14.3.28.

at the foot of a *sal* (*Shorea robusta*) tree.[161] In the Ambattha Sutta,[162] this is described as a rich agricultural village.

It occurs to the Buddha that he has not visited the devas of the Five Pure Abodes for a long time. This is the realm of the non-returners, stream entrants who have transcended the human condition and can never again be reborn on the earth plane. For this reason, the Buddha says that, as a Bodhisattva, he has never been reborn there. However, as a person for the final time, the Buddha resolves to visit the Five Pure Abodes, perhaps to complete his tour of samsara. The names of these abodes are Devas Not Falling Away, Untroubled Devas, Beautiful Devas, Clear-Sighted Devas, and Peerless Devas. The Aviha devas inhabit the lowest of these realms. When the Buddha transports himself to their location, they identify themselves as arhant-followers of Vipassi. Other devas come forward who identify themselves as arhant-followers of the other buddhas, Sikhi, Vessabhu, Kakusandha, Konagamana, and Kassapa, the last three in the present "fortunate age." (An age is "fortunate" if a buddha is born in it, so our age is five times blessed, which may explain the many good qualities that we find in it. In multiverse theory, there are an indefinite, perhaps infinite, but certainly vast number of essentially dead multiverses.)[163] These then recognize the same paradigm in the Buddha. The Buddha has the same experience in each subsequent Pure Abode, where the Atapha, Sudassa, Sudassi, and Akanittha devas greeted him.

What is fascinating about this description is certainly not its literal truth, not even the concepts of *buddha lineages, a buddha paradigm,* and the *generation of a mental body,* which we clearly recognize, but the close similarity between the description of the Five

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[161] The *sal* is a large evergreen or deciduous tree, used for timber, associated in Indian tradition with Vishnu. It is often the dominant tree in any forest in which it appears. Interestingly, Mahavira is believed to have attained enlightenment under a *sal. Sal* tree resin is used as an astringent in ayurvedic medicine and burned as incense.

[162] D 3.

[163] The total number of multiverses is estimated by calculation to be 10^10^10^7.

Pure Abodes and psychedelic experiences of the highest order, associated with entheogens such as soma, ayahuasca, psilocybin, *Salvia divinorum,* etc. We know that experiences of this type underlie the whole Vedic spiritual tradition. Interestingly, psychedelics are also specifically associated with the recollection of past lives.

In conclusion, Gotama declares that, as a tathagata, he will not be reborn, because, having "penetrated the fundamentals of dhamma" and "cut through multiplicity," he remembered the lives of the buddhas of the past. This is a distinctive twist on the theme of recalling past lives that appears elsewhere in the Pali Canon as a demonstration of the Buddha's attainment, and implies that all buddhas are ultimately identical in some sense, an idea that was developed by the Mahayana.

The Pali phrases that Walshe translates as "fundamentals of Dhamma" and "cutting through multiplicity" are interesting in themselves. The first is *Dhammadhatu;* the second is *papanca.*

Dhamma, or dharma, has a vast range of meanings, ranging from 'thing' to 'natural law' to 'truth.' *Dhatu* means 'element,' 'natural condition,' 'relic,' 'root' (of a word), 'bodily humour,' 'sense faculty.' Almost a synonym for *dhamma,* but more concrete, the *dhatus* are the component elements of which things are made (especially the four elements—fire, water, air, earth—which we would now refer to as "states" or "phases" rather than as "elements").

According to most Pali dictionaries, *papanca* means 'obstacle,' 'impediment,' 'delay,' perhaps 'illusion,' 'obsession,' 'hindrance to spiritual progress,' but Walshe follows an etymology, mentioned but not preferred by Rhys Davids in the PED, which means essentially 'expansion,' 'diffuseness,' 'manifoldness,' hence, 'multiplicity.'

Thus, we might translate this passage, "so it is, monastics, that by his analysis of reality into its component states, the Tathagata recalls the past buddhas who have attained final emancipation, cut through the illusion of appearances, blazed a trail, and exhausted rebirth, having passed beyond angst."

The Great Discourse on Causation

Digha Nikaya 15

Country: Kuru
Locale: Kammasadhamma
Speakers: Ananda, the Buddha

The Buddha is staying among the Kurus, a country in the northwest whose inhabitants are the reputed descendants of Uttarakuru, the quasi-mystical continent to the north of Jambudvipa.[164] Kuru is the name of an ancient Vedic tribal union in the northwest region of the *mahajanapadas*. They were the first known South Asian state about 1000 BCE. There the Vedic hymns were arranged in collections, developing the orthodox rituals of Brahmanism. There Vedic ritual life was born. The Kuru kingdom was also oppressive and warlike. The legends and traditions of the Mahabharata are based on the Kurus. Its culture and politics dominated the Middle Vedic period but, after about 850 BCE, its influence waned and, by the Buddha's time, it had become something of a backwater.

The Buddha stayed in the jungle outside a market town called Kammasadhamma. In the Majjhima Nikaya, we learn that the people of Kammasadhamma are good Buddhists.

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[164] See D 32.

This sutta features a conversation between the Buddha and Ananda. Ananda famously informs the Buddha how profound and clear he finds the doctrine of interdependent origination.

Ananda is clearly very pleased with himself, but the Buddha chastises him, reprimanding him for thinking that interdependent origination is easy to understand: "Do not say that, Ananda, do not say that. This Dependent Origination is profound and appears profound."[165] The Buddha declares that "it is through not understanding, not penetrating this doctrine that this generation has become like a tangled ball of string, covered as with a blight, tangled like coarse grass, unable to pass beyond states of woe, the ill destiny, ruin and the round of birth and death."[166]

On the other hand, therefore, it is through understanding interdependent origination that one untangles the string of samsara and so achieves emancipation. Clearly, the Buddha's implication is that Ananda has not yet achieved emancipation. In fact, according to tradition, Ananda did not become an arhant until after the Buddha's passing.

Although the metaphor of the ball of string is applied to "this generation," tangled, blighted, trapped in samsara, the image clearly also applies to the doctrine of interdependent origination itself, in which everything is infinitely intervolved based on the operation of the Law of Karma. The Buddha's attitude to Ananda's generation is suggestive of the attitude of Jesus or Socrates to theirs.

In his search for the ultimate solution of the problem of dissatisfaction, the Buddha begins with ageing and death. Thus, the Buddha's inquiry is rational, and it starts with the immediacy of lived, bodily experience, rather than with an abstract metaphysical system or postulate as other ancient systems did, including Indian philosophy. In this respect, the Buddha is exquisitely modern.

Relentlessly, the Buddha pursues the chain of cause and effect: **ageing and birth** (1) is conditioned by **birth** (2). The

[165] D 15.1.
[166] Ibid.

connection seems incontrovertible. Birth is conditioned by **becoming** (3). Becoming is conditioned by **clinging** (4). Clinging is conditioned by **craving** (5). Craving is conditioned by **feeling** (6). Feeling is conditioned by **contact** (7). Contact is conditioned by **mind and body** (8). Mind and body is conditioned by **consciousness** (9).

The Buddha identifies four kinds of clinging: sensuous clinging; clinging to views, which we might term dogmatic sectarianism; clinging to rituals; and clinging to the personality, which we might call ego (another translation of *atta,* 'self').

Together, mind-body and consciousness condition each other. Thus, mind-body condition consciousness and consciousness conditions mind-body ("mind" regarded as the formative aspect and "consciousness" as the cognitive aspect, the "act of observation"). The arrow of time originating in the double dyad of mind-body and consciousness develops through the chain of interdependent origination until it results in birth, ageing, and death, only to recur eternally until the cycle is broken and one achieves emancipation.

The chain of interdependent origination takes different forms in different suttas. Sometimes consciousness is conditioned by formations (*sankharas*), which are in turn conditioned by ignorance (*avijja*), which is declared to be the root of the chain despite its cyclical nature (thus, the relationship seems to be logical, not temporal). In this variation, there are nine causes, and the root is declared to be feeling, the sixth cause in the chain, counting from ageing and death. Note that the six sense bases, given in the version of this diagram that we encountered in the last sutta, are missing in this variation.

In this variation, the Buddha is focused on the problem of craving, and declares that if feeling born of sensory contact ceases, so will craving. This word, 'feeling,' is Pali *vedana, '*feeling,' 'perception,' 'sensation,' 'pain,' 'angst.' The context suggests that the Buddha is referring to the craving for pleasure and its corollary, the aversion toward pain. If there is absolutely no feeling toward pleasure and pain, the absence and cessation of feeling breaks the chain

of cause and effect that leads to craving, thus effecting emancipation.

THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF CRAVING, TERRITORIALITY, PROPERTY, MONEY, AND WAR

At this point in the sutta, the Buddha segues into another application of the doctrine of interdependent origination, commencing from the faculty of craving: "And so, Ananda, feeling conditions craving."[167] Now the Buddha creates a new interdependent origination, showing that the doctrine is not the diagram but the principle or method, and that many interdependent origination sequences are theoretically possible. In this segue, craving conditions **seeking**, seeking conditions **acquisition,** acquisition conditions **decision-making,** decision-making conditions **lust,** lust conditions **attachment,** attachment conditions **appropriation,** appropriation conditions **avarice,** avarice conditions **possessiveness,** and because of possessiveness there arise **violence,** "quarrels, disputes, arguments, strife, abuse, lying, and other evil unskilled states."[168] In a remarkable anticipation of communalism, the Buddha identifies property ("acquisition") as the root cause of all the rest.

In this way, the Buddha applies the doctrine of interdependent origination to the problem of the origin and development of human society and social order. In the Buddha's analysis property, money, and war are interconnected and are bad factors, connected to the factor of craving, which is in turn the cause of bondage to samsara. I have identified the Buddhist political position with what we would today call **social democracy.** The Dalai Lama calls himself a Marxist.[169] Although the Buddha positions himself in relation to the mercantile economy of his time, there are also favourable references to

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[167] D 15.9.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Smithers, "Occupy Buddhism or Why the Dalai Lama Is a Marxist."

communalism in the Pali Canon, but Marxist materialism is inconsistent with the Buddhist point of view, though not totally so.

The Buddha's analysis is suggestive of that of Laozi's Tao Te Ching, for example:

> Do not exalt the worthy,
> and the people will not compete.
> Do not prize rare goods,
> and the people will not steal.
> Do not display what is desirable,
> and the people's hearts will not be troubled.
> Therefore the sage, in ruling,
> empties their minds,
> fills their bellies,
> weakens their ambitions,
> and strengthens their bones.
> He always keeps the people without knowledge and without desire,
> and keeps the clever from daring to act.
> Act by non-action,
> and nothing will be left ungoverned. (3)

Craving, moreover, has two aspects: craving in itself, which serves as the basis of rebirth, and craving in action, or craving-seeking (*samudacara-tanha*).

THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF *NAMARUPA* AND *VINNANA*

We have discussed the duality of the psychosomatic complex consisting of *nama* (mind or 'name'; cf. Laozi) and *rupa* ('matter,' 'form,' or 'image') and *vinnana* ('consciousness,' 'life force,' 'mind,' or 'discernment'). PED refers to *namarupa* as a dyadic unity, so that the duality of *namarupa* and *vinnana* becomes a second or "double" dyad, and therefore a kind of quaternary. In this complex, which Bhikku Bodhi describes as a "vortex," *nama* and *vinnana* both refer to the mental aspect, which together constitute the *nama-kaya* (lit. 'name-body'). Similarly, the physical aspect is the *rupa-kaya* (lit. 'form-body'). In both of these constructions 'body' has the connotation of an aggregate or assemblage. The Buddha observes that in

the absence of mental "properties, features, signs, or indications," the mind does not grasp at the body, nor does the body grasp at sensory reactions by the "mind-factor." In his concept of "properties, features, signs, or indications," the Buddha is getting at the same concept as Laozi's *ming:*

> The Way that can be spoken is not the constant Way.
> The name (*ming*) that can be named is not the constant name.
> The nameless is the beginning of heaven and earth.
> The named is the mother of the ten thousand things.
> Therefore, ever without desire, one sees its subtlety.
> Ever with desire, one sees its outer form. (1)

The Buddha implies that it is the *vinnana* that "enters into" the mother's womb, whereas the psychosomatic complex (*namarupa*) develops there. Thus, *vinnana* or consciousness is the originating non-corporeal principle, whereas the psychosomatic complex is associated with the body. Thus, *vinnana* is the psychic element, whereas *nama* is akin to what we ordinarily call bodily consciousness or mind immersed in the somatic element: "Thus far then, Ananda, can we trace birth and decay, death and falling into other states and being reborn, thus far extends the way of designation, of concepts, thus far is the sphere of understanding, thus far the round goes as far as can be discerned in this life, namely to body and mind together with consciousness."[170]

THE SELF (*ATTA*)

From consciousness the Buddha segues to various conceptions of the self: as material and limited, material and unlimited, immaterial and limited, or immaterial and unlimited, thus defining the self in terms of the two axes of materiality/immateriality and finitude/infinitude. The Buddha then adds a third axis: time. Either the self is now or will be in the future. The Buddha contrasts all these theories

[170] D 15.22.

with the negative form of the same propositions, thus positing a sort of *tetralemma,* the logical quaternary formula.

But what, asks the Buddha, is the self? What are its specific characteristics? Here the Buddha explores various identifications of the self, as feeling or not feeling. With respect to feeling, he points out that feelings—pleasant, painful, or neutral—are impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen. This transience (*anicca*) is incompatible with the idea of "self" as a permanent identity, so it is not proper to say that feeling is the self.

On the other hand, the view that the self is not feeling is self-contradictory because in such a state there is no idea of "I am." Similarly, if the self is asserted to feel but not be identical with feeling, in the absence of feeling there is no idea of "I am this." Therefore, it is not proper to say that the self is not feeling ("impercipient" in Walshe's translation).

Thus, "when a monk no longer regards feeling as the self, or the self as being impercipient, or as being percipient and of a nature to feel, by not so regarding, he clings to nothing in the world; not clinging, he is not excited by anything, and not being excited he gains personal liberation."[171] That is to say, he gains liberation for himself alone. There is no salvation of others, no "vicarious atonement."[172]

THE POST-MORTEM STATE OF THE TATHAGATA

One question that arises in early Buddhist thought is the post-mortem state of a tathagata, a perfectly enlightened Buddha who is not subject to rebirth. Thus the Buddha says, "if anyone were to say to a monk whose mind was thus freed, 'The Tathagata exists after death,' that would be seen by him as a wrong opinion and

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[171] D 15.32.

[172] This in itself demonstrates the reality of individuality. Emancipation is for oneself alone. There is no universal emancipation, no "vicarious atonement," no "dewdrop slips into the shining sea."

unfitting."[173] It seems at first that there is no post-mortem state for a tathagata, despite the Buddha's persistent references in the Pali Canon to "the deathless." This passage seems to affirm a form of nihilism, except that the Buddha continues, "likewise, 'The Tathagata does not exist…both exists and does not exist…neither exists nor does not exist.'"[174] Thus, the Buddha sets up a *tetralemma,* refuting every logical alternative regarding the Tathagata's existence or non-existence after death, including the statement that "the Tathagata does not exist," which is equally declared to be false. Bhikku Bodhi suggests that this is because the premise of the question, *that there is a self,* is mistaken, which raises a whole host of different problems (and is probably false, as Bodhi admits). However, right after this statement the Buddha explains why all the logical variations of this axiom are false: "As far, Ananda, as designation and the range of designation reaches, as far as language and the range of language reaches, as far as concepts and the range of concepts reaches, as far as understanding and the range of understanding reaches, as far as the cycle reaches and revolves—that monk is liberated from all that by superknowledge."[175]

Thus, the Tathagata's post-mortem state is inscrutable not because he does not exist, or because of the non-existence of a self, but rather due to the limitations of rational linguistic understanding. Clearly, "superknowledge" is beyond designations, language, concepts, and (rational) understanding, which is based on static and dualistic conceptions of existence, non-existence, both existence and non-existence, and neither existence nor non-existence. Thus, the post-mortem state of a tathagata can only be known non-dualistically and trans-dualistically; no rational, dualistic statement about it can be true. Similarly, the Buddha rejects static, finite, dualistic conceptions of the self. There is, moreover, a fundamental

[173] D 15.32.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Ibid.

difference between conceptualization and experience. In the words of Korzybski, "the map is not the territory."

SEVEN STATIONS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The seven "stations" of consciousness correspond to the planes of existence classified according to body and perception. We have discussed the thirty-one planes of existence, of which the seven stations are a simplification.

The seven stations of consciousness

Station	Deva(s)	Jhana	Body	Perception
1	People, some devas, some in states of woe	N/A	Different	Different
2	Brahma's retinue	1	Different	Alike
3	*Abhassara* (streaming radiance)	2	Alike	Different
4	*Subhakinna* (refulgent glory)	3	Alike	Alike
5	Infinite space	N/A	N/A	Transcendence of the perception of matter, vanishing of perception of sense reactions, non-attention to the perception of variety
6	Infinite consciousness	N/A	N/A	N/A
7	Nothingness	N/A	N/A	N/A

In addition to the seven stations, the Buddha identifies two 'realms' or 'spheres' (*ayatanani*), consisting of the Unconscious Beings and the inhabitants of the plane of Neither Perception Nor Non-perception, the latter being the highest plane of samsara, above the seventh station of Nothingness. The Unconscious Beings refer to the Mindless Devas, one of the deva realms corresponding to the fourth meditative attainment, corresponding to a realm of beings that have bodies but no consciousness. Rebirth in this plane

results from a meditation in which consciousness is suppressed, based on the mistake that the suppression of consciousness is equivalent to liberation. Inhabitants of the plane of Neither Perception Nor Non-perception have consciousness but no body and are unable to hear dharma. I assume that these two are grouped together because they represent different kinds of non-perception.

EIGHT LIBERATIONS

Finally, the Buddha identifies eight "liberations." Walshe notes that these represent a sequence of steps necessary in order to attain final liberation.

1. Possessing form, one sees forms.
2. Not perceiving material forms in oneself, one sees them outside.
3. Thinking, "it is beautiful," one becomes intent on it.
4. Completely transcending all perception of matter, by the vanishing of the perception of sense-reactions, and by non-attention to the perception of variety, thinking, "space is infinite," one enters into and abides in the Sphere of Infinite Space. *This corresponds to the fifth station.*
5. Thinking "consciousness is infinite," one enters into and abides in the Sphere of Infinite Consciousness. *This corresponds to the sixth station.*
6. Thinking, "there is no thing," one enters into and abides in the Sphere of Nothingness. *This corresponds to the seventh station.*
7. Transcending the Sphere of Nothingness, one reaches and abides in the Sphere of Neither Perception Nor Non-perception. *This corresponds to the first "realm," in Walshe's translation.*
8. Transcending the Sphere of Neither Perception Nor Non-perception, one enters into and abides in the Cessation of Perception and Feeling. This is *nirodha-samapatti* (lit. 'attainment of annihilation'), a synonym for nirvana, from which it

is possible to "break through" (Padmasambhava refers to a "leap")[176] to the state of a non-returner or an arhant.

Concerning this, the Buddha says, "when once a monk attains these eight liberations in forward order, in reverse order, and in forward and reverse order, entering them and emerging from them as and when, and for as long as he wishes, and has gained by his own super-knowledge here and now both the destruction of the corruptions (the *asavas,* consisting of sensual pleasures, craving for existence, and ignorance), and the uncorrupted liberation of heart and liberation by wisdom, that monk is called 'both ways liberated'...there is no other way of 'both ways liberation' that is more excellent or perfect than this."[177] Similarly, in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta,[178] when the Buddha died he "rose" through the planes and descended them again, then re-ascended to achieve the ultimate state of *parinibbana* from the fourth jhana. Similarly, interdependent origination has two "directions." The "natural" order goes from ignorance (in the variation presented in this sutta, consciousness) to birth, old age, and death, which is the cycle of samsara, whereas the order that is "against the current," leading from birth, old age, and death to ignorance/consciousness, leads to liberation (cf. the "method of reversal"). We would call these entropy and negentropy respectively. Note the emphasis on the "here and now," the present moment, which alone is real, as I have discussed in my book, *Fundamental View,* in connection with the problem of past and future in the context of rebirth.[179]

The liberation of heart refers to dispassion, based on the factor of desire. The liberation by wisdom refers to the antithesis of ignorance, the root factor of interdependent origination in the complete

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[176] See Guenther, *Teachings of Padmasambhava,* pp. 6, 11, 17–20, 58f., 83f., 172, 174, 213.

[177] D 15.36.

[178] D 16.

[179] Op. cit., pp. 87–95.

12° variation. The former refers to the liberation of an arhant, whereas the latter refers to the liberation of a bodhisattva. Together, they constitute the liberation of an Arhant Buddha, which is the perfect and complete liberation. As the correspondence with the thirty-one planes of existence, the basis of Buddhist ontology, clearly shows, these attainments are not merely psychological; they are also ontological.

The Great Final Emancipation

Digha NIkaya 16

Countries: Magadha, Vajji, Malla
Locales: Vulture's Peak, Rajagaha; Ambalatthika; Nalanda; Pataligama; Kotigama; Nadika; Vesali; Beluva; Bhandagama; Hatthigama; Ambigama; Jambigama; Bhogganagama; Pava; Kusinara
Speakers: Ananda, the Buddha, Sariputta

Forty-seven pages in length in Walshe's translation, the Mahaparinibbana Sutta may be the longest sutta in the Sutta Pitaka. Walshe calls this sutta "The Great Passing." In a biographical context, it refers to the "passing over" or passing of the Buddha. However, my translation highlights its doctrinal significance: *para* refers to 'going beyond,' much as in English, whereas a more modern translation of *nibbana* than 'extinction' is 'emancipation,' since technically nirvana is the extinction of *illusion* (or even more technically, desirous attachment to ephemera). This title may even be interpreted as hinting at a realization beyond nirvana itself.

This sutta gives a meticulous account of the last year of the Buddha's life. Two things about this sutta are of special interest—the biographical details of the Buddha's life, of which this is the longest and most coherent account in the Pali Canon, and the doctrinal details to which the sutta refers, both implicit and explicit. I have identified thirty-five such doctrines, ranging from the statement that "tathagatas never lie" to the circumstances of the First Buddhist Council, held about three months after the Buddha's passing.

In the first part, we provide context by summarizing the events described in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta. In the second part, we identify and discuss the thirty-seven principles, one by one and in detail.

PART I

The sutta begins with the Buddha staying at Vulture's Peak (*Griddhraj Parvat*), near Rajagaha. Literally, 'the hill of vultures,' Walshe describes it as "a pleasant elevation above the stifling heat of Rajagaha."[180] **Rajagaha** (modern Rajgir), the first capital of the kingdom of Magadha, appears in the second sutta, in which the Buddha is asked to explain the fruits of the homeless life. It became famous in the Mahayana sutras.

The king of Magadha at that time was Ajatasattu (Skt. *Ajatasatru*), famous for murdering his father, Bimbisara, and expanding the Magadha kingdom by conquest, so that it became the most powerful kingdom in northern India. At this time, Ajatasattu wants to attack the Vajjians. Ajatasattu respects the Buddha, so he sends his minister, Vassakara, to use the Buddha as a kind of oracle. That is to say, a buddha exists in a perfectly internally and externally coherent state, in which emancipation and the Power of Truth are related. We have seen how the dharma associates emancipation and psychic powers. It is interesting that such an important sutta, describing the final teachings and passing of the Buddha, should open with such a morally ambiguous device. Is this an indication of the state of things at the end of the Buddha's life?

The Buddha, speaking to Ananda, presents a list of "seven principles for preventing decline" based on the Law of Karma. Since the Vajjians follow them, their society is healthy, strong, and able to repel any attack. Vassakara decides that to conquer the Vajjians by force is impossible, but that a war of propaganda might set them against each other. Because of this dialogue, the Buddha teaches

[180] Walshe, *Long Discourses,* p. 567, n. 364.

the "seven things that are conducive to welfare" to the sangha. This is the beginning of the Buddha's final instructions to the sangha. The Buddha also gives a comprehensive discourse at Vulture's Peak, before he moves on to **Ambalatthika.** In each subsequent place, he repeats the same comprehensive discourse on the mutual interdependence of morality, meditation, and wisdom.

Ambalatthika appears in the first sutta, where Suppiya and Brahmadatta are debating the merit of the Buddha within earshot of the sangha, while they are travelling together.

Afterward the Buddha travels on to **Nalanda,** a minor village at the Buddha's time. Here Sariputta, the disciple renowned for his wisdom, declares that there will never be anyone greater or more enlightened than the Buddha. However, the Buddha criticizes Sariputta, asking him how he could know that his statement is true.

> You have spoken boldly with a bull's voice, Sariputta, you have roared the lion's roar of certainty. How is this? Have all the arahant Buddhas of the past appeared to you, and were the minds of all those Lords open to you, so as to say, 'These Lords were of such virtue, such is his teaching, such his wisdom, such his way, such his liberation'? ... And have you perceived all the arahant Buddhas who will appear in the future ... So, Sariputta, you do not have knowledge of the minds of the Buddhas of the past, the future or the present. Thus, Sariputra, have you not spoken boldly with a bull's voice and roared the lion's roar of certainty with your declaration? (1.16)

The Buddha's segue from praise to irony and his love of discourse is a characteristic idiosyncrasy of the *Buddhavacana* in the Pali Canon. I would like to think that it reflects a similar quirk in the syntax of the historical Buddha. Sariputta, however, does not accept the Buddha's critique, saying, "Lord, the minds of the arahant Buddhas of the past, future and present are not open to me. But I know the drift of the Dhamma" (*dhammanvaya*).[181] PED has 'main drift of

[181] D 16.1.17.

the faith, general conclusions of the [Dharma].' Walshe translates *vaya* as 'way' or 'drift.' The root meaning seems to be 'energy,' 'strength,' 'vitality' (Skt. *vayas;* also, 'man,' 'hero'; cf. Lat. *vir,* 'virtue'). Sariputta seems to mean that he can identify a true buddha by their behaviour. The conversation ends here. Perhaps the Buddha assents to Sariputta's explanation by silence, or perhaps the conclusion of the discussion is lost.

The Buddha then goes to **Pataligama** (Skt. *Pataliputra*). This was a small "water fort" where the Ganges, Gandhaka, and Son rivers converge. The Buddha predicts that Pataligama, then a minor administrative centre, will become the capital. The archaeological record shows significant urban development beginning in the fourth century BCE,[182] so that by the time of Ashoka Pataliputra was one of the world's largest cities. It was a centre of trade and commerce where merchants and intellectuals converged from all across India.

It was also, according to the sutta, the home of thousands of spiritual beings, earthbound sky devas who, interestingly, influence the minds of the government officials telepathically. This fascinating and easily overlooked detail correlates *precisely* with Jacques Vallée's study of the repeated appearance all through history of what are today termed "UFOs," which he considers to be both real and physical, but non-extraterrestrial. Most academics ignore it.

The Buddha and Ananda go to **Kotigama.** Here the Buddha gives a talk on the Four Noble Truths. Thence they go to **Nadika,** where the Buddha is asked to describe the future rebirths of twelve deceased monastics and lay followers, both female and male, in terms of the grades of the path that leads to arhantship. The Buddha does not like doing this, however, and he is tired, so he teaches Ananda a special meditation called the Mirror of Dharma, by which one may attain the rank of a stream entrant at

[182] This supports the view that the Buddha died early in the fourth century prior to the appearance of the Nanda Empire in 345 BCE, who were the first to make Patiliputra their capital. It suggests that this sutta is later than this date.

will. Perhaps the Buddha's fatigue is the first indication that something is physically wrong with him.

Next, the Buddha travels to **Vesali,** the capital city of the Licchavi, the dominant tribe of the Vajjian Confederation, and the birthplace of Mahavira, the great Jain reformer who lived about the same time as the Buddha. The city is described as large, crowded, rich, and prosperous, with abundant food and numerous pleasure gardens and lotus ponds. This is the residence of the royal courtesan, Ambapali, who entertains the Buddha and his entourage. Here he gives a talk on awareness and meditation.

Next, they visit **Beluva,** described as a "little village" just outside Vesali. Here the Buddha stops for the rainy season, sending the rest of the monastics *back* to Vesali. The Buddha wishes to spend the rainy season alone. It seems that the decision to stay in Beluva is something of a surprise, since it is clear from the sutta that the Buddha actually sends the monastics back to Vesali, rather than simply leaving them behind. Ananda alone stays with the Buddha.

Mortal pains begin to afflict the Buddha. By an effort of will, the Buddha overcomes these feelings and for a time seems to have recovered. Ananda comes to him and entreats the Buddha to give a final statement about the order to the sangha before he dies. Ananda's request and the Buddha's reply suggest there were some successional issues already developing within the order that Ananda suspects might develop into a crisis after the Buddha's passing. The Buddha seems cross:

> But, Ananda, what does the order of monks expect of me? I have taught the Dhamma, Ananda, making no 'inner' and 'outer': the Tathagata has no 'teacher's fist' in respect of doctrines. If there is anyone who thinks, 'I shall take charge of the order,' or 'The order should refer to me,' let him make some statement about the order but the Tathagata does not think in such terms. So why should the Tathagata make a statement about the order? Ananda, I am now old, worn out, venerable, one who has traversed life's path. I have reached the term of life, which is 80. Just as an old cart is made to go by being held together with straps, so the Tathagata's body is kept going by

> being strapped up. It is only when the Tathagata withdraws his attention from outward signs, and by the cessation of certain feelings, enters into the signless concentration of mind, that his body knows comfort. Therefore, Ananda, you should live as islands unto yourselves, being your own refuge, with no one else as your refuge, with the Dhamma as an island, with the Dhamma as your refuge, with no other refuge. (2.25f.)

The Buddha takes Ananda to the Capala Shrine in Vesali, where he prepares Ananda for his passing in three months. Afterward, they travel to the Gabled Hall in the Great Forest, where the Buddha calls together an assembly of the monastics and delivers his final statement to the sangha.

After the rainy season ends, Ananda and the Buddha travel to **Bhandagama,** where he speaks on samsara and non-rebirth. The Buddha and Ananda then travel to a succession of places, including **Hatthigama, Ambagama, Jambugama,** and **Bhogganagara,** in the last of which he teaches the Four Criteria (see Principle #27, below).

After this the Buddha and Ananda go to **Pava** (usually identified with Fazilnagar), located in the republic of Malla, north of Magadha. The Mallas are described as a brave and warlike people. Here the Buddha stays at the mango grove of Cunda the blacksmith. Cunda comes to receive teaching from the Buddha and invites him to take his morning meal with him. This meal includes a dish called 'pig's delight' (*sukara-maddava*). The dish does not agree with the Buddha, who experiences diarrhea and mortal pains.

The Buddha declares his intention to travel to **Kusinara** (Kushinagar), a celebrated centre of the Malla kingdom.[183] On the road, the Buddha is overcome by fatigue and rests under a tree. Overcome by thirst, he asks Ananda to bring him some water from the

[183] Hajime Nakamura suggests that the Buddha's final destination was Kapilavastu, but that his sickness overcame him before he could reach it. See his *Gotama Buddha,* Vol. 2, pp. 24–28.

nearby stream. Ananda tells him that it was recently disturbed by a large number of wagons or carts, and urges the Buddha to wait until they reach the river Kakuttha. However, the Buddha insists that Ananda bring him the tainted water from the stream, potentially poisoning him with a toxic infection as well. The sutta naively informs us that the water became pure as Ananda approached it.

After refreshing himself, the Buddha and Ananda go on to the river Kakuttha, where the Buddha bathes, drinks, and goes to the mango grove. There he lies down on his right side.

Again, the Buddha moves on, this time to the Mallas' *sal*-grove near Kusinara, across the Hirannavati River, on the bank of which he lies down on his right side, his head pointing north. This is a sacred yoga posture in which pious Hindus still prefer to die if they can arrange it. The *sal* trees are barren (the sutta naively states that they burst into blossom). Since the *sal* tree blossoms naturally in March and April, it seems likely that this occurred in the late winter, perhaps March, about the time of the Buddha's eightieth birthday.[184] The Buddha gives final instructions regarding his funeral, the disposition of his remains and other things to Ananda, and he praises him to the monastics. As Ananda summons the Mallas to witness the passing of the Buddha, the Buddha gives a dharma talk to Subhadda and ordains him, which at that time was a simple verbal formula. The Buddha then gives his final instructions to the sangha. His last words are, "Now, monks, I declare to you: all conditioned things are of a nature to decay—strive on untiringly."[185]

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[184] Nakamura objects that even in winter, temperatures are mild and trees blossom all through the year in northeast India, but then why does the sutta make such a distinction? H.W. Schumann, on the other hand, states that in December and January (Indian winter) the temperature at night is only just above freezing, described as "mercilessly cold" (*The Historical Buddha,* pp. 51, 229). He also says that the *sal* trees flower in April and May (op. cit., pp. 80, 248).

[185] D 16.6.7.

The Buddha falls into a coma and in the third watch of the night (roughly 2 to 6 am), he dies. Many scholars today say that this took place between 410 BCE and 370 BCE.[186]

The Mallas honour the body of the Buddha with dance, song, music, garlands, and perfume for a whole week. Then they take the body out the east gate to the Mallas' shrine at Makuta-Bandhana, possibly a hall. Meanwhile, Mahakassapa, the Buddha's foremost living disciple, is travelling when he hears of the Buddha's passing and makes his way to Kusinara, arriving just in time to witness the cremation. The Buddha's body is cremated and, amidst some bickering, the relics are divided into ten parts, which are distributed to various groups who are friendly toward the Buddha and his dharma. These sites of great stupas continue to receive veneration and pilgrimage to this day.[187] One of these relic depositories was discovered in the late nineteenth century by William Peppé, and is widely believed to have contained at least a part of the mortal remains of the Buddha.[188]

PART II

Nearly forty fundamental spiritual principles are embedded in the narrative. Thus, the Mahaparinibbana Sutta constitutes one of the most important foundational documents of historical Buddhism.

FIRST RECITATION SECTION

Principle #1: Tathagatas Cannot Lie (1.2). King Ajatasattu of Magadha uses the Buddha as an oracle because tathagatas, having achieved self-perfection, are in perfect synchrony with themselves and with reality itself, as they must be if they have reached identity with their ground. This passage highlights the paradox of the

[186] See Chronology.

[187] Including Lumbini, the birthplace of the Buddha; Bodh Gaya, the place of his Enlightenment; Isipathana (modern Sarnath), the site of the first sermon; and Kusinara (modern Kushinagar), where he died.

[188] See Allen, *Buddha and Dr. Führer.*

coexistence of the corrupt and violent nature of northeast India in the fifth century BCE and the deep spiritual faith of the people, including many of their rulers.

Principle #2: The Political Philosophy of the Buddha (1.4). The Buddha sets out a comprehensive political philosophy, thus showing that even a transcendent being continues to care for the inhabitants of the world of samsara. Indeed, the political organization of society is a recurring theme in the Pali Canon. These principles include government by assembly, peace, respect for tradition, respect for elders, women's rights, public religion, and a national spiritual tradition. These precepts follow the organizational principles of the quasi-democratic Vajjian republic, which were also similar to the principles of the Shakyan republic of the Buddha's clan.

Principle #3: Precepts for the Sangha: Communitarianism (1.6). The precepts for the monastics also parallel those of the Vajjians, and include government by assembly, harmony, self-control (replacing respect for tradition), respect for elders, dispassion (replacing women's rights), forest dwelling (replacing public religion), and awareness (replacing a national spiritual tradition).

Principle #4: Communalism (1.11). The sangha is based on commonality of property, but does not supersede civil society, which supports the sangha so that the sangha is a function of civil acceptance, and not the reverse (thus, the concept of a Buddhist religious government is a contradiction in terms, despite the references to a national spiritual commonality). Interestingly, the northern continent of Sumeru, Uttarakuru, which is the home of the longest-lived and most advanced race of human, is communitarian. Presumably this will be the social system of Shambhala when, according to the Kalachakra, it appears in the early twenty-fifth century of the common era.

Principle #5: Wisdom Is the Salvific Principle (1.12). A recurring theme that runs all through the Mahaparinibbana Sutta is the mutual relationship between morality, ethics, or virtue (self-control); one-pointedness, concentration, or meditation; and wisdom or gnosis. In some sects of religious Buddhism today this threefold division of the Noble Eightfold Path virtually replaces the Noble

Eightfold Path. The path is presented as beginning with the cultivation of virtue, followed by meditation. Because of these two things, wisdom, identified with enlightenment, arises spontaneously.

The Buddha states that meditation, imbued with morality, brings great fruit and profit, and that wisdom, imbued with meditation, brings great fruit and profit, *but that it is the mind imbued with wisdom that brings about emancipation.* Thus, the sequence is morality (since meditation cannot be imbued with something that it does not have), meditation, and wisdom. Note, however, the subtle distinction made here between morality and meditation on the one hand and wisdom on the other. Morality and meditation are skilful means (*upaya*), but wisdom is the essential salvific principle, which brings the threefold partition into alignment with the Noble Eightfold Path, the first "limb" of which is Right View (or Wisdom) that leads the aspirant to the attainment of the first crucial stage of the stream entrant. It seems, then, that the proper sequence of the path is wisdom, morality, and meditation. Wisdom is not merely something that is attained. It is also something that is cultivated. This view is confirmed in the doctrine of interdependent origination, the radical or first principle of which, ignorance (*avijja*), is resolved by wisdom. Wisdom is also the essential attainment of a buddha, whereas ethics and meditation, leading to the state of dispassion, are the essential attainments of an arhant. If one reads the Pali Canon, it is clear that the realization of wisdom brings about emancipation. There are many stories of aspirants attaining emancipation simply by hearing a dharma talk of the Buddha or another follower of the Buddha, followed by a period of meditation as short as a week. Meditation, though necessary, is not primary.

Principle #6: The Greatness of the Buddha (1.16). Sariputta, renowned for his wisdom, affirms that the Buddha is the best and most enlightened ascetic or Brahman of all time. Rather than accept this praise, the Buddha turns it against Sariputta, first chidingly affirming him—"You have spoken with a bull's voice, Sariputta, you have roared the lion's roar of certainty"—and then questioning him—"Have all the Arahant Buddhas of the past appeared to you,

and were the minds of all those Lords open to you? Have you perceived all the Arahant Buddhas who will appear in the future? Do you even know me as the Arhant Buddha?"[189] To all these questions Sariputta is forced to admit his ignorance. Thus, the Buddha ironically concludes, "Have you not spoken boldly with a bull's voice and roared the lion's roar of certainty with your declaration?"[190]

Such is my reading of this text, which might be read as an affirmation of Sariputta's faith, were it not for the emphasis the Buddha placed on questioning and Sariputta's defensive reply. Rather, the Buddha challenges Sariputta to justify his claim. Sariputta's reputation for wisdom was not misplaced, for he turns the tables on the Buddha, and proves to the Buddha that his respect for him is not based on faith or clairvoyance, but on his knowledge of the 'drift of the dharma' (*dhammavaya*). This refers to the Buddha's statement that, though we may not know the dharma, we can judge the dharma by its effect—true dharma always yields good karma; something that has bad karma cannot be true dharma, reminiscent of the statement by Jesus that one can judge a tree by its fruits. However, one must be careful not to conflate real and apparent goodness. Goodness does not necessarily "feel good," or even "look good," whereas something that does not "feel good" is not automatically bad. Similarly, in the Gospel of Thomas Jesus said that the first stage of spiritual progress is agitation.[191]

Principle #7: Comprehensive Dharma Versus Dharma in Brief (1.18). Comprehensive dharma is often contrasted with dharma in brief or "in short" (*samkhittena*). As Peter Masefield points out in *Divine Revelation in the Pali Canon,* the distinction is obscure, since the content of comprehensive dharma and dharma in brief often seems to be similar.[192] Dharma in brief is frequently requested before an aspirant goes into the forest for a period of

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[189] D 16.1.16.
[190] Ibid.
[191] See logion 2.
[192] Op. cit., pp. 101f.

intensive solitary meditation, often culminating in arhantship. It seems that it might be similar to an oral transmission or empowerment, as in the tantric traditions.

Principle #8: The Motif of the Axis Mundi (1.22). The Pali Canon frequently presents the Buddha as sitting with his back against a pole or pillar. The monastics sit behind the Buddha, facing the lay followers, who sit in the east facing the Buddha. Thus, to the sangha the Buddha appears in the place of the rising sun, and to the lay followers in the place of the setting sun, foremost of the sangha, with the sangha as "support."

The motif of the pole or pillar alludes to the tree of awakening (the Bodhi tree, *Ficus religiosa*), sitting under which the Buddha attained enlightenment. The Buddha also experienced his first meditative state as a child while sitting under a rose apple tree, and dies between two *sal* trees, while lying on the ground in accordance with Indian custom. He is also born under a *sal* tree. Similarly, the Buddha enjoins his followers to live in the forest as a place of refuge. India has a long history of sacred trees and forests, as well as many other societies. When the Buddha breaks his vow of abstinence when he is on the verge of dying, he is seated under a tree, and Sujata offers him a bowl of milk-rice, believing that he is the spirit of the tree to which she had come to make a food offering. The sacred tree is representative of the polar or vertical axis, like Mount Meru, through which communication with the higher worlds becomes possible. The pillars of Ashoka also refer to this symbolism, all of which represent the *axis mundi*—the cosmic axis, world axis, world pillar, *columna cerului,* center of the world, or world tree, the omphalos (navel) of the world, and is a universal motif of the *philosophia perennis* with its origin in prehistoric shamanism.

Principle #9: The Path of the Householder: The Way of Karma (1.24). Buddhism is not merely a spirituality of monastics, ascetics, and recluses. In fact, originally the Buddha emphasizes the

teaching of lay people.[193] The Buddha has many followers who are householders, and some of these attain arhantship. Thus, the Buddhist science of spirituality also includes the path of the householder. The path of the householder is based primarily, but not exclusively, on the path of karma, i.e., removing bad karma through self-purification and acquiring merit through the cultivation of good karma. Thus, Buddhism is not divorced from practical life, and reveals itself as a pragmatic spiritual philosophy. This is shown by the Buddha's summary of the perils and advantages of good and bad morality, which he designates as failure and success in morality. Success includes wealth, reputation, confidence and assurance, dying unconfused, and rebirth in a higher world.[194] It is clear from this and other passages that though the sangha was communally organized, the Buddha realizing that the extension of that system of social order to civil society as a whole was not practical. It does not seem that the Buddha opposes property and wealth in civil society, for example; it is clear from other passages that he sees wealth as imposing special social obligations on the wealthy, and that he advocates social redistribution of property and wealth for the general good. It is also clear that the Buddha, like Laozi, sees the development of money and property as socially pernicious factors that lead to criminality, violence, and war.

Principle #10: The Cohabitation of Devas and People (1.26, 3.50). The word "deva" is usually translated as "god" or "deity," but this is really a very unsatisfactory translation. The English word means "that which is called or invoked," whereas the Sanskrit/Pali word means "shining," referring to a celestial being of light, rather like Plato's flying spheres. According to the PED, divine beings are splendid, mobile, beautiful, good, and luminous, as well as

[193] See Nakamura, *Gotama Buddha,* Vol. 2, p. 57.

[194] Curiously, the Pali Canon emphasizes rebirth in a higher world as a valid goal, especially for householders, though emancipation from a deva state is considered to be more difficult than from the human state, if not impossible, and devas are always reborn in a lower state, not necessarily human.

continuous with the life of humanity and all beings. They are beings who occupy higher worlds in the system of vertical extension, but it is clear from this passage that divine beings also coexist with humanity. Interestingly, Patna or Pataligama is one of the oldest continuously inhabited places on earth and the largest city in the world between 300 and 195 BCE. About 300 BCE, a hundred years after the death of the Buddha, its population was about 400,000. The text says thousands of divine beings invisibly inhabited this city, influencing the minds of people telepathically. This is the only place I know of that documents this aspect of the life of divine beings and people. This passage is interesting because it implies that the Buddha does not direct his teaching to humans only, but he also teaches spiritual beings.

The Buddha himself claimed to be aware of such divine beings and to have received teachings from them. We know from the thirty-one planes of existence that at least three spiritual realms have intercourse with human beings, including the Four Great Kings, Thirty-Three Gods, and Brahma realms, and that the 'anti-gods' appear to occupy the same plane as humans, viz., the one world ocean. Here we encounter another interesting bit of lore regarding the divine beings, for Ananda asks Anuruddha, a cousin of the Buddha and one of the five principal disciples, which divine beings he is aware of. Anuruddha was ranked as one of the foremost in the attainment of the divine eye. Anuruddha refers to sky devas and earth devas whose minds are earthbound in contrast to divine beings who are free from desirous attachment. The last category implies that divine beings can practise the teaching and attain realization, something that the Pali Canon implies throughout despite the dogma that one often hears that only human beings are capable of emancipation. The anti-gods of course are another example of earthbound devas, cast down from the realm of the Thirty-Three Gods due probably to their association with nature. The earth devas may refer to the Four Great Kings, the realm of what we refer to when we refer to the sprites, tree spirits, elves, fairies, pixies, gnomes, Japanese yokai, the Spanish and Latin-American

duende, and various Slavic fairies, and other similar beings of all times and climes.

Principle #11: The Divine Eye: Ajna Chakra (1.27). The Divine Eye is referred to frequently. In the Pali Canon, this is one of the six gnoses (*chalabhinna*).[195] In this context, it refers to knowing the karmic destinations of others. However, it has a larger meaning as well. It is enumerated as one of the three wisdoms (*tevijja* or *tivijja*), along with the memory of past lives and the extinction of the mental intoxicants. In the Mahasaccaka Sutta,[196] the Buddha says that he obtained the Divine Eye during the second watch of the night (10 pm–2 am) of his enlightenment. In the Mahaparinibbana Sutta, it is by means of the Divine Eye that the Buddha sees devas. The Divine Eye is also a universal symbolic motif or archetype. In Egyptian and Indian mythology, one finds the eye of Horus and the eye of Shiva respectively. It also appears in Freemasonry, where a semicircular glory appears below the eye, which is enclosed in a triangle. In Christianity, it represents the Eye of Providence, where clouds or sunbursts surround it. The Eye of Providence also appears on the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of the French Revolution.

In the Indian chakra system, the eye appears as the *ajna* chakra, the eye of intuition and intellect, located in the centre of the forehead. In Tibetan Buddhism, the "third eye" is the upper end of the central energy channel that runs up the spine to the top of the head. This centre is also important in Qigong, Sufism, and Cabala. In people, the Divine Eye corresponds to the pineal gland, in the centre of the brain, a vestigial third eye that actually appears in lizards, amphibians, and fish. Descartes calls this organ "the seat of the soul." According to modern research, the pineal gland is the source of naturally occurring dimethyltryptamine (DMT), the most powerful psychedelic known, which is also widely found in nature.

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[195] "Higher powers," clairaudience, telepathy, recalling past lives, clairvoyance, and extinction of mental intoxicants.

[196] M 36.

Interestingly, DMT facilitates vivid otherworldly visions including encounters with non-human entities of exactly this sort.

Principle #12: The Buddha Was Not an Extreme Ascetic (1.30). Although it is well-known that the Buddha rejected the extreme asceticism of the proto-Shaivite *samanas* with whom he associated prior to his enlightenment, the Buddha is still regarded as moderately ascetic, illustrated for example by the quite rigid rules of the Vinaya. Nevertheless, it is clear from the Pali Canon that the Buddha's life, while simple, also had its pleasures. There are numerous examples in the Pali Canon in which the Buddha and his entourage are invited to the home of a wealthy local person, usually either political figures or celebrities, to be entertained with a fine meal of choice food, which they invariably ate to their satisfaction. Since the Buddha travelled extensively, this must have occurred frequently. The Buddha and his entourage also often occupy comfortable parks and other places of great natural beauty. These facts stand as useful correctives to the extreme view that the Buddha was exclusively ascetic.

Principle #13: A Meaningful Miracle: More Evidence of Proto-tantra (1.33). Although the Pali Canon is largely naturalistic in its descriptions of people and events, it attests to the reality of psychic powers, and sometimes these appear as full-blown miracles, as in the story of the Buddha and his entourage transporting themselves from one side of the Ganges to the other. This is especially ironic in view of the disparagement of miracles by the Buddha in the Patika Sutta.[197] Similarly, Jesus disparages those who seek a sign, declaring that no sign will be given to them, yet the Gospels and the Church continue to ascribe miracles to him as the proof of his divinity.

The Buddha correctly saw that the belief in miracles leads to a superstitious reverence for the person or the power rather than the one true miracle, the miracle of the dharma itself, which leads to ontological emancipation. Nevertheless, the presence of miracles of

[197] D 24.1.4.

this type in the Pali Canon is another indication of the early development of proto-tantric literary motifs even in the first period of pre-sectarian Buddhism, much as Gnosticism appeared early in the development of Christianity. One can derive valid messages from such stories even if they are not literally or historically true.

SECOND RECITATION SECTION

Principle #14: The Mirror of Dharma (2.8). The Mirror of Dharma presents a method whereby the aspirants can realize for themselves the state of stream entry, whereby they realize that they will achieve emancipation within no more than seven rebirths. The method is to cultivate *absolute confidence* in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. This method must be differentiated from Christian faith, however, which is virtually defined as "belief for belief's sake," whereas the Buddha states that the "unwavering confidence" to which he refers is based on "inspection, leading onward, to be comprehended by the wise *each one for himself*"[198] (italics added). Moreover, the *morality* of such an aspirant must be *perfect.*[199] By this method, one can know for oneself as a matter of certainty that one has achieved stream-entry.

Principle #15: Awareness (2.12, 2.13). The Pali word translated as 'mindfulness' is *sati.* According to the PED, the etymological meaning of this word is 'memory,' 'to remember'; also, 'recognition,' 'consciousness,' 'intentness of mind,' 'wakefulness of mind,' 'mindfulness,' 'alertness,' 'lucidity of mind,' 'self-possession,' 'conscience,' 'self-consciousness.' The Sanskrit word is *smrti,* which also refers to the oral recitation tradition of the Vedas. The reference to self-consciousness is somewhat disconcerting, given the Buddha's apparent rejection of the *atta* (Skt. *atman*) theory, commonly identified with the self. Awareness is probably also connected with the recollection of past lives, which is emphasized in the Pali Canon. Awareness

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[198] D 16.2.9.

[199] Cf. Jesus, "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5.48, RSV).

begins with awareness of the body, and is then extended to feelings, mind, and mind-objects.

Principle #16: A Courtesan Entertains the Buddha (2.14). As we saw, though the Buddha clearly lives a very modest and simple life, it is not without its pleasures, in the form of the choicest food when prominent people in various communities entertained him and his entourage. It is also clear that the Buddha interacts with and teaches women without distinction. A striking confirmation of both of these observations is the Buddha's interaction with Ambapali, a wealthy *ganika* who lives in the Licchavi city of Vesali, part of the Vajjian confederacy. Although Walshe politely renders the Pali word *ganika* by 'courtesan,' comparing her to the Japanese tradition of the geisha, the PED simply renders the word as 'harlot,' 'one who belongs to the crowd,' i.e., a common woman or, perhaps, a promiscuous woman, though Ambapali is a *royal* harlot. Nonetheless, Ambapali is a wealthy and beautiful woman who is a *nagavradu,* a 'royal courtesan' who is also a prominent and wealthy citizen of the town.

The Buddha stays in her mango grove, teaches her the dharma, and goes to her home for his morning meal, accompanied by his monastic entourage. The Buddha does not seem to see this as a violation of the Vinaya rule against consorting with women, and a prostitute at that. Clearly, the Buddha is neither a fundamentalist nor a judgmental prude. He consorts with women, teaches them the dharma on an equal basis with men, and is not above enjoying a fine meal or the company of a beautiful, but high class, prostitute. In this and in many other ways, the Buddha seems to be similar to Jesus. Ambapali makes a gift of her mango grove to the sangha and later becomes an arhant.

Principle #17: Energy, the Force of Life, Health, and Longevity (2.23, 3.40). Here we encounter the first major sign of the Buddha's impending illness. The monastics remain at Ambapali's park in Vesali, whereas the Buddha spends his last rainy season in Beluva, a small town outside the southern gate of Vesali. What is most interesting about this passage, however, is the reference to energy and a "force of life" by which the Buddha is able to overcome his

illness and postpone its effects so that he can take his leave of the order of monastics. The Buddha recommends the cultivation of energy, but only in a few places is it clear that this energy is an iddhi, a psychic power that has vital benefits, comparable in fact to kundalini, which the Buddha seems to have experienced during his ascetic period.[200] This brings the Buddha's teachings into relation with kundalini yoga, the Tibetan concept of *tumo,* the Chinese concept of qi, etc.

Principle #18: Inner and Outer Dharma (2.25). Here and elsewhere the Buddha indicates that his teaching has no "inner" and "outer," that he has no "teacher's fist" in respect of doctrines. This is widely interpreted to mean that Buddhism is exoteric, and that there is no esoteric dharma, no "secret wisdom," such as Vajrayana, Tantra, Theosophy, etc. imply. However, this is not, strictly speaking, what the Buddha says. The Buddha says that he makes no distinction between inner and outer, teaching everything to everyone openly and without secrecy. Walshe himself recognizes this when he states that there is no contradiction here between this passage and the Simsapa Sutta. In the latter, the Buddha distinguishes between knowledge that leads to liberation and other forms of knowledge, as vast as the leaves in the *simsapa* forest are numerous. The latter is of the same order as the former, and is known because of realization: "So too, bhikkhus, the things I have directly known but have not taught you are numerous, while the things I have taught you are few."[201] The distinction that the Buddha is making seems to be between praxis and gnosis, the latter the goal of the

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[200] The Buddha refers to an illumination that he experienced because of his ascetic practices, which he associated with severe physical pain: "But although tireless energy was aroused in me and unremitting mindfulness was established, my body was overwrought and uncalm because I was exhausted by the painful striving. But such painful feeling that arose in me did not invade my mind and remain" (MN 36.20-25, repeated in MN 85 and 100). This experience was effected by means of intense mental concentration, extreme breath control, and self-starvation. This sounds typical of kundalini awakening.

[201] S 56.31.

former. Thus, the latter does in effect constitute a secret wisdom, an untaught knowledge that is nonetheless the object of realization. What the Buddha is actually saying here is that he openly teaches the entirety of wisdom, but he emphasizes the praxis first, because it is through the latter that one realizes the former. In the Simsapa Sutta, the practice referred to is the Four Noble Truths. Clearly, however, the Buddha taught a great deal more than the Four Noble Truths. This is the only interpretation that reconciles and harmonizes all relevant passages, and shows the importance of not preselecting passages.

Principle #19: The Sangha Has No Leader (2.25). In this very significant passage, the Buddha makes it clear that he does not want to be succeeded as head of the sangha. In other passages the Buddha disdains being thought of as a "leader," referring to himself rather as a friend among friends. Later in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta, the Buddha states that the monastics should take the dharma as their leader. Nevertheless, after the Buddha's passing, and backed by King Ajatasattu, the sangha appoints Mahakassapa, at his own instigation, as its leader at the First Buddhist Council, followed by Ananda. Since the appointment of a leader violates the Buddha's dictum with respect to the organization of the sangha, one may question the legitimacy of the early Buddhist councils; the legitimacy of the arhants becomes an issue when the Sthaviras (lit. 'elders' or 'arhants')—precursors of the so-called Theravada—split from the Mahasamghikas—the majority—after the Second Buddhist Council over questions regarding the rules of the Vinaya and the infallibility of the arhants. This split became the basis of the division between the Eighteen Schools and the Mahayana and the Mahayana's ultimate adoption of the path of the bodhisattva as its goal.

Principle #20: The Dharma Is the Only Refuge (2.26). The monastics are to live freely as individuals, within a cooperative sangha, with themselves and the dharma as their only refuge (sometimes translated as 'retreat'). Again, the reliance on the self is paradoxical in light of the *anatta* doctrine. Some scholars believe that the formula of the Three Jewels, i.e., taking refuge in the

Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, is a later innovation that arose about the time of Ashoka (third century BCE), and that the original refuge formula referred to the Dharma only.[202] Clearly, the kind of sangha described by the Buddha is very different from the hierarchical, authoritarian sangha that we often see today. Although the Buddha respected seniority, the sangha is supposed to emphasize independent self-inquiry and free thought and consensus (failing which, majority rule), without excessive attachment to rules, rituals, or beliefs and without a single leader. The Dalai Lama, to his credit, honoured the Buddha's dictum by stepping down as the political leader of the Central Tibetan Administration in 2011 and fostering a democratic constitution. In this regard, as in many others, the Buddha seems to be exceptionally modern.

THIRD RECITATION SECTION

Principle #21: The Four Roads to Power (3.3). The Four Roads to Power are another example of magical or proto-tantric thinking in the Pali Canon. This practice is not aimed only at awakening or enlightenment but also at the development of psychic powers—in this context, longevity. In Walshe's translation, success in this practice enables the practitioner to live for a hundred years, close to the maximum longevity of people. Specifically, had Ananda taken the hint, he might have asked the Buddha to extend his life by this means and live another twenty years.[203] However, Ananda—who is represented in the suttas as a bit dull—did not take the hint.

The four roads to power (*iddhipada*) are not explained further in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta, but we know what is involved from the Viraddha Sutta.[204] In this sutta, the Buddha states that the practice consists of the development of four qualities: will (*chanda*), energy (*viriya*), intention (*citta*), and inquiry (*vimamsa*), which are in turn

[202] Rhys Davids, *Minor Anthologies,* Part 1, p. xliv.
[203] This is the prevailing modern interpretation.
[204] S 51.2.

based on the cultivation of concentration (*samadhi*) and concentrated mental aspiration (*padhana-sankhara*).

Principle #22: The Dharma, the Power of Truth, and Merit (3.7). We see again a reference in the "Dhamma of wondrous effect" to the universal ideas that pervade the Pali Canon, especially the Jatakas, of the Power of Truth and the Act of Truth. This is a pan-Indian idea, in which the ultimate truth of things itself exercises an influence that is beneficial and powerful. Mahatma Gandhi utilized this as a political principle, which he called *satyagraha.* This is also the principle of merit. Like mantra, the study, teaching, or recitation of dharma is held to be intrinsically efficacious and beneficial.

Principle #23: Conscious Dying (3.10). According to this passage, the Buddha does not die as a matter of accident or involuntarily; he intentionally renounces the life principle, mindfully and with clear awareness. One might be inclined to regard this as mythologization, but one would be mistaken. This principle of conscious dying is also found among the Tibetan lamas, some of whom are reputedly able to will themselves to die. This skill is widely attested. This practice is portrayed in the movie, *Little Buddha.* In Tibetan Buddhism, this practice is called *phowa.* It is the highest of the Six Yogas of Naropa. Dzogchen meditation is considered the highest, greatest, and most essential *phowa* practice.

Principle #24: Two Nirvanas: With and Without Remainder (3.20). There are two types of nirvana, the final "going out" or extinction of desirous attachment, with and without "remainder." The arhant who attains nirvana ceases to make new karma due to the absence of desirous attachment, but existing karma still needs to work itself out. This suggests that karma is not entirely destroyed by nirvana. If all karma were destroyed by nirvana, then one would die immediately. If the destruction of karma is the precondition of attaining nirvana, then the attainment of nirvana is impossible. The Buddha appears to teach that the attainment of nirvana destroys *much* karma, *but not all.* This view of nirvana also corresponds to the Buddha's life. After he attained enlightenment, the Buddha remained in an altered state of consciousness for a whole week, after which he returned to ordinary consciousness. He

continued to live, and the evidence of the Pali Canon is that he continued to engage in spiritual retreats, practising awareness of the breath—this behaviour makes no sense if the Buddha is already a perfected being. Rather, it implies a being that still needs and benefits from spiritual practice. Finally, the Buddha exhausts his remaining karma and renounces the last vestige of attachment to life. He dies, attaining the state of perfection called *parinibbana,* 'final emancipation,' characterized by absolute transcendence.

Principle #25: Eight Liberations: The Meditative Attainments (3.33)

Form Jhanas

1. Rapture and happiness born of seclusion;
2. Delight and happiness born of concentration without applied or sustained thought;
3. Quiet, subtle, and pervasive happiness, subtle enjoyment of mindful and equanimous mind, without rapture;
4. Stability, stillness, and equanimity, without happiness;

Formless Jhanas

5. Infinite space;
6. Infinite consciousness;
7. Nothing;
8. Neither perception nor non-perception—opening to the trans-dual; and
9. Cessation of feeling and perception.

Principle #26: The Buddha's Enlightenment Experience (3.34). The Buddha describes his monumental enlightenment experience, referring to having just attained supreme enlightenment. This seems to be an early statement, there being no reference to the three watches of the night, consisting of recalling past lives, karma, and interdependent origination, respectively. At sunrise, he attains full enlightenment, characterized by the encounter with Mara and the absolute transcendence of desirous attachment. Here, however,

the Buddha simply attains supreme enlightenment in a moment, suggesting the instantaneous theory of liberation. The name of the place is Uruvela, located in the state of Bihar; the river is Neranjara; and the tree is the Goatherd's Banyan Tree. Goat herders, having gone to the shade of the Banyan tree, would gather there, hence the name.

FOURTH RECITATION SECTION

Principle #27: The Four Criteria of Authentic Dharma (4.8). After the passing of the Buddha, the Buddha's sermons were remembered and recited by the sangha, especially by Ananda, the Buddha's personal attendant for the last twenty-five years of his life. Since only Buddhist arhants could participate in the First Buddhist Council, we are fortunate that Ananda, rather conveniently it seems, attained arhantship on *the night before* the council met, since without his participation many of the Buddha's teachings would have been lost. Thenceforth, the sangha came together to rehearse the teachings of the Buddha based on the memories of the participants. As the participants die off, the nature of this transmission changes. From being memories of the actual hearers, the recollections increasingly focus on questions of preservation, clarification, and codification of doctrine. These traditions were handed down in this way for about 350 years. With the passage of time, it becomes increasingly important to verify the validity of these teachings.

Therefore, it is of interest to read in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta the criteria applied to verify the validity of the teachings passed down. The sutta identifies four primary sources of such teachings that may be considered: the Buddha himself, but also the community of elders and teachers; a meeting of the elders; and a single elder. The sources of authority are clearly the Buddha himself and the senior bhikkus or *theras,* both as individuals and together with others. According to the PED, any monastic of any seniority may be called *thera* because of their wisdom; the Mahaparinibbana Sutta

says that any monastic may claim to have heard a teaching from "the Lord's own lips."

So much for the admissible sources of teachings. The Buddha cautions that any such claim is neither to be approved nor not approved. Rather, "his words and expressions should be carefully noted and compared with the Suttas and reviewed in the light of the discipline [Vinaya]."[205] *If the teaching conforms to the suttas or the discipline, it is to be accepted. If it does not conform, it is to be rejected.* Thus, a continuous preservation of tradition is guaranteed. The Buddha does not say who is sanctioned to verify the teachings. However, elsewhere he says that decisions are to be made by consensus of the sangha, or, failing consensus, by a majority.

An important point to note in this validation procedure is that *it is ideological, not historical.* The primary criterion is not whether the words and circumstances of the teaching are historically accurate or not, but whether they conform to the established standard of the dharma based on previously accepted teachings. In other words, is there a reasonable *continuity of teaching*? Receiving a teaching from the Lord's own lips is the first criterion, *but not the only one.* Thus, the accusation that is frequently made against the Mahayana sutras that they are false because they are non-historical is irrelevant. The truth or falsity of the Mahayana sutras is to be validated based on the same criteria as the Pali suttas themselves, i.e., are they consistent with the established teachings of the Buddha as handed down by tradition? In the same way, the conformity of the Pali texts with each other must also be subject to the same scrutiny. The method of logical syncretism or synthesis follows logically from such considerations.

Principle #28: The Buddha's Last Meal: Not Food Poisoning (4.18). The Buddha's final meal is translated by Maurice Walshe as "pig's delight," thus glossing over the obscurity of the Pali phrase, *sukara-maddava,* which may refer to pork or to a kind of truffle. This story is related to the speculation that the cause of the

[205] D 16.4.8.

passing of the Buddha is food poisoning. However, Dr. Mettanando Bhikkhu, in his article, "How the Buddha Died," suggests that food poisoning is an unlikely explanation of the Buddha's sickness, first, because the Buddha feels the onset of the sickness very quickly, whereas food poisoning takes several hours to incubate and, second, because food poisoning does not cause the bloody diarrhea mentioned in the sutta. He also rejects chemical poisoning, peptic ulcer, and hemorrhoids. Dr. Mettanando's conclusion, based on the symptoms described in the sutta, is that the Buddha died of mesenteric infarction, a medical condition in which inflammation and injury of the small intestine result from inadequate blood supply—a common disease of the elderly that is lethal after ten to twenty hours. Thus, it is not his final meal that kills the Buddha, but old age, though the size of the meal that the Buddha consumed may have been the trigger that brought about the second and final episode of the disease that we know from previous passages began to afflict the Buddha some eight or nine months before. The cogency of Dr. Mettanando's analysis also gives us confidence in the historical accuracy of the Mahaparinibbana Sutta.

FIFTH RECITATION SECTION

Principle #29: Women (5.9). As I discuss in "The Status of Women in Ancient India and the Pali Tradition," there are two distinct attitudes toward women expressed in the Pali Canon. One attitude disparages women, grudgingly admits that women are capable of enlightenment, and admits women to the sangha as second-class citizens, whereas the other makes no distinction between men and women, and admits women to the sangha, apparently on an equal basis with men. As we saw, the Buddha is not above enjoying a fine meal with a courtesan. Here, however, we see another, quite incompatible attitude toward women: we should not look at them, we should not speak to them, and if they speak to us, we should be cautious and aloof. This is mild compared with other passages in

the Pali Canon, which we will not discuss here.[206] The Buddha speaks to Ambapali. He delivers a talk on the dharma to her, which (the text states) instructs, inspires, fires, and delights her. It is possible that the rest of his entourage remain discreetly silent during the meal. Perhaps. On the other hand, perhaps what we are seeing here is two opposed, mutually incompatible views of women, as Bhikku Bodhi suggests in his introduction to the Anguttara Nikaya. If we accept Bodhi's view, then we must believe that the Buddha holds two incompatible views at the same time; that he abandoned one view in favour of the other at some point in his career—perhaps when Ananda "convinced" him to allow women to be admitted to the sangha; or that one of these views is an imposition by anonymous misogynistic monastic redactors of the Pali Canon. I consider the last to be the common sense view, since the first two views imply that the Buddha is unenlightened and are, frankly, absurd.[207]

Principle #30: Ananda (5.13). It is ironic that Ananda, who was called the Guardian of the Dharma due to his photographic memory, is both the Buddha's closest disciple and the least accomplished. In many ways, he is portrayed in the suttas as being a bit thick. Nevertheless, he serves the Buddha faithfully as his personal attendant during the final twenty-five years of the Buddha's career, when the Buddha is 55 to 80 years old, and is the source of much of the sutta tradition collected together in the Pali Canon. Ananda and the Buddha are first cousins through their father, Suddhodhana. The Buddha describes him as kind, unselfish, popular, and

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[206] But see M 21.6, 67.19, 115.15; S 37.1, 3; A 1.1–10, 279–83, 2.61, 3.129, 131, 4.80, 5.33, 55, 225, 226, 229, 230, 6.44, 52(4), 7.63, 8.15, 27, 46, 49, 51, 10.75. This list of citations is by no means exhaustive. As one can see, the number of misogynistic references is far greater in the Anguttara Nikaya, the fourth *nikaya,* the composition of which is considered to be fairly late. This is consistent with the contention that the Buddha was not a misogynist and that misogyny developed in the male Buddhist sangha after the Buddha's passing and increased over time.

[207] This did not stop the Thai sangha from declaring that an ordained nun is guilty of the "crime" of impersonating a monastic, or from expelling Ajahn Brahm for his importunate defence of women's rights.

thoughtful, as well as chief in conduct, service, and memory. Nevertheless, Ananda's participation in the First Buddhist Council, convened by Mahakassapa, the Buddha's disciple foremost in asceticism, was contested because he was only a stream entrant. The Pali Canon portrays Ananda as an imperfect, but sympathetic, figure, lonely and desolated after the passing of the Buddha. Nevertheless, he rather conveniently attains nirvana on the eve prior to the convention of the First Buddhist Council, where he is severely criticized by the arhants for persuading the Buddha to ordain women, as well as his failure to ascertain from the Buddha which rules of the Vinaya are major and minor. As a result, the rules of the Vinaya remain unchanged to this day!

Principle #31: The Gradual Versus the Instantaneous Path (5.27). The reference to four grades of attainment recalls the discussion that one finds in various places between advocates of the gradual path and advocates of the non-gradual path. That is, is enlightenment a process of gradual development or is enlightenment attained instantaneously?[208] The four grades are the attainments of stream entrant, once-returner, non-returner, and arhant. However, this path, the path of the arhant, which the Buddha doubtless teaches, is not the path of the bodhisattva (lit. 'awakening-being'), which the Buddha himself followed, and the Pali Canon makes it clear that the ten powers of an arhant are not the same as and apparently inferior to the ten powers of a Tathagata Buddha.[209] An essential difference, moreover, is that a bodhisattva/buddha is self-ordained by definition, as in the original *samana* tradition, which reappears later in the Brahma Net and Srimala sutras, whereas an arhant always receives the dharma from a buddha; thus, an arhant always follows and is, thus, inferior to a buddha. However, the Buddha himself is also referred to as an arhant. The distinction between

[208] Gradualism is the Indian view, subitism the Chinese view. Both views are referred to in the Pali Canon. From the trans-dual perspective, there is no difference.

[209] A 10.90; M 12.9–21.

an arhant and a buddha became a point of contention after the Second Buddhist Council, resulting in the great schism between the Mahasamghika majority, which subsequently developed into the Mahayana, and the Sthaviravada minority, which subsequently developed into the Eighteen Schools, and the so-called Theravada.

SIXTH RECITATION SECTION

Principle #32: The Dharma Retreat (6.1). The imminent passing of the Buddha obviously raises the problem of how the sangha should organize itself after the Buddha's passing. In these passages, the Buddha addresses this issue. First, the Buddha states that the dharma and the discipline—the Dharma-Vinaya, which is the name that the Buddha gave to his teaching—is the teacher after his passing. In addition, whereas during the Buddha's lifetime the sangha was egalitarian, in which all members of the community addressed each other—even the Buddha—as "friend" (*avuso*), rather like the Quakers, and even admitted each other to the sangha, the Buddha declares that after his passing the sangha should be organized as a decentralized hierarchy based on seniority, in which the junior monastics address the senior monastics as "Lord" (*bhante*) or "Venerable Sir" (*ayasma*). Some scholars also hold that the formula of the Three Jewels originates during the time of Ashoka (third century BCE), whereas the original formula is singular. That is to say, the original Buddhists only took their refuge (more properly, "retreat") in the Dharma alone.[210]

Principle #33: The Minor Rules of the Vinaya (6.3). Contrary to the fundamentalism that seems to characterize many followers of the Vinaya today, the Buddha further declares that the "lesser and minor" rules of the Vinaya may be abolished. Unfortunately, when the Buddha said this, Ananda did not ask the Buddha which of the rules are major and which are minor, so the First Buddhist Council, led by Mahakassapa, the so-called Father of the Sangha,

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[210] See Rhys Davids, *Minor Anthologies,* Part 1, pp. xxvi, xliii ff.

took the conservative approach of abolishing none of them. There are six Vinayas known today—that of the Theravada, Mahasamghika, Mahisasaka, Dharmaguptaka, Sarvastivada, and Mulasarvastivada, three of which are still followed by the Theravada, East Asian Buddhists (Dharmaguptaka), and Tibetan Buddhists (Mulasarvastivada), but the scholarly consensus is that the Mahasamghika Vinaya is the oldest.[211] The Mahasamghika subsequently developed into the Mahayana.

Although many religious Buddhists strongly emphasize the rules of the Vinaya, the original Buddhist sangha did not follow any fixed set of rules for six years. These develop gradually over the course of the Buddha's life in response to specific situations, therefore reflecting the social conventions of the time. Apparently, the Buddha is quite flexible about the observance of these rules. For example, according to the Vinaya itself the rules may be abrogated if required for reasons of health or to prevent a crime. Alcohol and drugs are permitted for healing.[212] The Buddha frequently warns the monastics against attachment to rules, rituals, and dogmas. A Vajjian monastic complains to the Buddha that he cannot stand such training with so many rules and regulations. Far from reprimanding him, the Buddha asks him whether he can stand the threefold training in higher morality, higher thought, and higher insight. In Mahayana, these became the three higher trainings.[213] Once proficient in this, lust, malice, and delusion are abandoned and no wrong deed is performed without needing to follow the rules. The implication is that slavish adherence to the letter of the rules is not required to attain emancipation. Interestingly, the Vajjians also bring about the great schism in the Buddhist order during the Second Buddhist Council on this very question of rules.

The core of the Vinaya is given in the *patimokkha.* When one analyzes these rules, one finds about ten essential rules, very similar

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[211] Skilton, *Concise History of Buddhism,* p. 48.
[212] Ariyesako, *Bhikkus' Rules.*
[213] A 3.84.

in fact to the Bodhisattva Precepts. These are grouped into rules that entail automatic expulsion from the sangha for life (*parajika*), rules requiring an initial and subsequent meeting of the sangha (*sanghadisesa*) that result in a period of probation, indefinite rules (*aniyata*) based on acknowledgment of the offence, rules entailing confession with forfeiture (*nissagiyya*), rules entailing confession (*paccitiyya*), violations that must be verbally acknowledged (*patidesaniya*), and training rules (*sekhiyavatta*).

The Brahma Net Sutra (mid-fifth century) is one of the oldest summaries of the Bodhisattva Precepts, which exist in many variations. The ten major Bodhisattva Precepts are:

1. Not to kill;
2. Not to steal;
3. Not to engage in licentious acts;
4. Not to use false words and speech;
5. Not to trade or sell alcoholic beverages;
6. Not to defame the sangha;
7. Not to praise oneself and speak ill of others;
8. Not to be stingy;
9. Not to harbor anger; and
10. Not to speak ill of the Buddha, the Dharma, or the Sangha (lit. 'the Three Jewels').

These rules include not encouraging others to break them. In addition, there are forty-eight minor rules, which are not always regarded as mandatory. Note that the consumption of alcohol is not expressly forbidden, only trade. Mrs. Rhys Davids argues in the introduction to her translation of the Khuddaka-Patha that it is not the "sensible use" of liquors, but rather the habit, frequency, and occasions for indulging in them, which was originally prohibited.[214] In any case, it is clear that the Vinaya regards it as a relatively minor offence, being the fifty-first of ninety-two *pacittiyas,* requiring

[214] *Minor Anthologies,* p. xlvii.

confession only, preceded by "not to witness military activities" and followed by "not to tickle." We know from the Supreme Net (Brahmajala Sutta)[215] that the Buddha regards ethical and moral rules to be *oramattakam silamattakam*—'merely profane (mundane), merely ethical (practices).'

Principle #34: Subhadda and the First Buddhist Council (6.20). Subhadda is the last monastic to be ordained by the Buddha. We know that the First Buddhist Council was contentious, and that this contentiousness persisted in later councils too. In any case, Subhadda the barber suggests that the rules might be relaxed (something that the Buddha himself advocated), precipitating the First Buddhist Council.

Mahakassapa, the disciple foremost in asceticism, called the First Buddhist Council together shortly after the Buddha's passing, despite the fact that the Buddha said that the sangha should have no leader other than the dharma. Presumably, Mahakassapa also brought an ascetic orientation to the council and, as with all organizations, had both supporters and detractors. Indeed, it is clear from the Cullavagga that Mahakassapa's group sponsored the council, and that others were excluded.[216] The First Buddhist Council was held during the rainy season about three months after the Buddha's passing. Since the rainy season retreat begins in late June or July, it seems likely that the Buddha died in March, which is consistent with the statement that the *sal* trees between which the Buddha died bloomed prematurely. I already talked about how the "arhants" at this council castigated Ananda for convincing the Buddha to ordain women and for failing to clarify which were the major and minor rules of the Vinaya. Indeed, so deep was the misogyny of the arhants of this council that Ananda was castigated for allowing women to view the Buddha's body after his passing, which (they claimed) their tears defiled.[217] Presumably, Ananda too had his

[215] D 1.
[216] See Horner, *Book of Discipline,* Vol. 5, p. 395, n.1.
[217] Ibid, pp. 400f.

supporters and detractors, so we see here how the politics of the First Buddhist Council may have played out. It is an open question whether all the monastics present at the First Council were men. Dr. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, in her article, "The History of the Bhikkuni Sangha," argues that female monastics were also present.

The Great Splendour

Digha Nikaya 17

Country: Malla
Locale: Kusinara
Speakers: Ananda, the Buddha

This discourse takes place at Kusinara shortly before the *parinibbana*, which is perhaps why it follows the Mahaparinibbana Sutta. The sutta is an expansion of the conversation referred to between Ananda and the Buddha in which Ananda entreats the Buddha not to allow himself to die "in this miserable little town of wattle and daub, right in the jungle in the back of beyond."[218] To refute Ananda's description of the town, the Buddha tells the story of King Mahasudassana, whose name means 'Great King of Glory.' This story also occurs in the Jatakas. Under the name of Kusavati, Kusinara was the capital of the king's realm. The Buddha compares it to a deva city, Alakamanda.

One *uposatha*—we do not know the month—the king is fasting on the roof of his palace when he has what can only be described, in the light of contemporary information, as a close encounter with a UFO. It appears to him as the disk of the sun, thousand-spoked, complete with rim, hub, and all appurtenances. In other words, he experiences a celestial solar wheel similar in appearance to the wheels of Ezekiel plunging in and out of the sea.[219] According to the account, the wheel shows the king where he should conquer and

[218] D 17.1.3.
[219] See Ezek. 1.

expand his territory, which he did with great success. The countries that the king invades surrender without resistance, and the king establishes a pacific society based on the principles of dharma. Once the king's new dharma kingdom is established, the UFO hovers over the king's palace. *Clearly, the UFO is associated with the power of the truth of the dharma.*

It does not matter whether this story is fabricated or not. The point is that at this remote place and time we find exactly the same mythologem that we find repeated all through human history, in all times and climes, and that is still being propagated today as the story that we call "the UFO phenomenon." Other civilizations may have seen it differently or given it different names, but the phenomenology is clear, by whatever name one calls it.

The sutta gives the familiar list of five precepts—do not kill, do not steal, do not commit adultery, do not lie, do not drink strong drink, together with a sixth, "be moderate in eating." Walshe admits that the meaning is uncertain, but it seems to be the secular equivalent of the monastic vow to eat only in the morning.

After establishing his kingdom, the king is presented with a succession of six treasures. These symbolize the characteristics of the ideal king:

1. **The Elephant Treasure (a.k.a. Precious Elephant):** mental strength, noble gentleness, and calm majesty. The name of the Precious Elephant is Uposatha, the Indian lunar holiday symbolically associated with soma (*amrita*).
2. **The Horse Treasure (a.k.a. Precious Horse):** transcendence of worldly existence, Valahaka ('Thunder Cloud') by name. This horse has the head of a crow.
3. **The Jewel Treasure (a.k.a. Precious Jewel):** omniscience (the jewel is like a crystal ball in which everything is seen, which also appears in the symbology of Dzogchen). The jewel is a beryl, literally 'precious blue-green colour of sea water stone,' cut into eight facets. In Sanskrit, it is *Vaidurya,* 'brought from Vidura.' Vidura is also a character in the Mahabharata, renowned as a paragon of truth,

dutifulness, impartiality, and steadfastness. The Sanskrit name originally referred to lapis lazuli, a deep blue semi-precious stone.

4. **The Woman Treasure (a.k.a. Precious Queen):** radiating, piercing joy, characterized by a more than human, deva-like beauty.
5. **The Householder Treasure (a.k.a. Precious Counsellor):** the power to provide wealth and strength of will.
6. **The Counsellor Treasure (a.k.a. Precious General):** the power to overcome enemies.[220]

We already identified the Precious Wheel with the dharma.

Described in minute detail suggestive of visionary phenomena, these "treasures" are "the Seven Jewels of Royal Power." They are also found in the mandala offering ritual, in which one offers the entire universe to the buddhas. Mandala offering is the fourth inner preliminary of *ngondro,* which purifies attachment (and thus represents the attainment of dispassion). This shows the close tie between Tibetan ritual and the Pali Canon. By analogy, the treasures also represent the qualities of the spiritual aspirant.

The king is also endowed with the Four Accomplishments (*iddhi*) of personal beauty, longevity, health, and reputation. The king beautifies his city with lotus ponds, and builds public baths, food banks, plumbing, clothing dispensaries, public transportation, hostels, even places where one can find a wife or obtain money (the very opposite of brothels and banks). The aristocrats are so satisfied with the king's rule that they want to build him a palace, but Sakra (Pali *Sakka*), the ruler of the Gods, steps in and has his personal architect, Vissakamma, build him a fabulous palace. This is called the Palace of Dharma, which is described with the same attention as the precious treasures. These surreal, highly detailed, symbolic, and aesthetic descriptions suggest the paradises in Pure Land Buddhism or the mandalas of Tibetan Buddhism. Walshe suggests that

[220] See Sawyer, "Offerings to Mahakala."

the description influenced the description of Sukhavati, the Western Land of Bliss, in Pure Land Buddhism. These vivid architectonic descriptions also suggest the psycho-ontological allegories of Padmasambhava.[221] The king then makes a Dharma Lake to complement the Dharma Palace.

It is clear that the Buddha, living in a time of terrible corruption and violence, was seeking not only to instigate a spiritual or a cultural reformation, but a political one as well.

Establishing himself in the Palace of Dharma, King Mahasudassana ruminates on the karma that brought him to this place, and he identifies three kinds of karma responsible:

- **The karma of giving,** which returns to him as wealth;
- **The karma of self-control,** which returns to him as political power; and
- **The karma of abstinence,** which returns to him as great opportunity.

Entering the great gabled chamber, the king declares, "May the thoughts of lust, ill will, and cruelty cease," rather like a mantra or an affirmation (or an Act of Truth). Seated cross-legged on the golden couch, he bans all sense desires and unwholesome thoughts from his mind, and immediately enters the first meditative attainment; he rapidly progresses through the second through fourth meditative attainments. He then leaves the great gabled chamber, enters the golden gabled chamber, and sits down on the silver couch, where he practises metta meditation, pervading the four quarters with love, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity (called the 'Four Divine Abidings,' *brahmavihara*).

We can take several things away from this description. First, the significance of the vow (Power of Truth). Second, the cross-legged posture, the asana of meditation that goes back at least to the Indus Valley civilization (c. 2500 BCE). Third, the cultivation of

[221] See Guenther, *Teachings of Padmasambhava,* passim.

dispassion, the key to the realization of meditative attainment. Fourth, that a king or a householder can engage in these practices with success. Fifth, the relationship between jhana and metta meditation.

A notable detail is that the king attains the fourth meditative attainment, practises metta, and is reborn in the Brahma world. However, the attainment of the fourth meditative attainment is the attainment of an arhant who should be reborn in one of the Five Pure Abodes at least. To me this description is a prefiguring of the path of the bodhisattva,[222] who, having attained the meditative attainments, chooses to pursue metta rather than nirvana, thus ensuring his rebirth for an indefinite period. Elsewhere the Buddha specifically states that he has not been born in any of the Five Pure Abodes because that would preclude any human rebirth, further distinguishing the nature of his attainment from that of an arhant.

The story of King Mahasudassana takes place when humanity exists in a purer, more deva-like state, and the longevity of these devas is about 336,000 years, the age of King Mahasudassana when he died.[223] The king meditates in the great gabled chamber for a long time until Queen Subhadda, thinking that she had not seen him for many years, comes to the palace with her retinue. The king moves

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[222] A significant difference between the conception of the bodhisattva in the Pali Canon compared with the Mahayana tradition is that in the Pali Canon the bodhisattva is represented as a being striving for buddhahood, which is achieved, though after a period of many rebirths over vast epochs of time (the Jatakas include 547 such stories, dating from the fourth century BCE, and are regarded as canonical by some early Buddhist sects), culminating in the attainment of tathagatahood and the cessation of rebirth, whereas in the Mahayana the bodhisattva vows not to attain buddhahood until all beings in samsara attain complete emancipation (essentially forever, given the scale and complexity of the project). The former is called the "king-like" bodhisattva, the latter the "shepherd-like" bodhisattva. A third category is the "boatman-like" bodhisattva, who vows to attain buddhahood along with all other sentient beings. An unstated fourth category is implied in the Kalachakra myth of Shambhala.

[223] Elsewhere people are said to live between ten and 80,000 or 84,000 years, comparable to the longevity of the devas of the world of the Four Great Kings in the Vibhajyavada tradition.

his golden couch outside the great gabled chamber (presumably so that the consecrated space would not be defiled by the presence of a woman) and lies down in the doorway on his right side, mindful and clearly aware, like the Buddha at his *parinibbana*. This posture is also an asana, a physical posture having spiritual symbolic significance.

The Queen notices the clarity and brightness of the King's complexion,[224] and fears he might be dead. The Queen entreats the king to live, reminding him of his worldly possessions and responsibilities, but the king rebuffs her, saying, "All things that are pleasing and attractive are liable to change, to vanish, to become otherwise. … To die filled with longing is painful and blameworthy."[225] Shortly thereafter the king dies. The sutta points out that "he felt the sensation of passing away,"[226] and is reborn in the Brahma world.

The Buddha then reveals to Ananda that he, Gotama, is in fact King Mahasudassana from a former life:

> Six times, Ananda, I recall discarding the body in this place, and at the seventh time I discarded it as a wheel-turning king, a righteous king who had conquered the four quarters and established a firm rule, and who possessed the seven treasures. But, Ananda, I do not see any place in this world with its devas and *maras* [demonic beings] and brahmas, or in this generation with its ascetics and Brahmins, princes and people, where the Tathagata will for an eighth time discard the body. (2.17)

This passage attests both to the Buddha's recollection of past lives and to the transcendent nature of a tathagata.

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[224] This is an indication of cellular regeneration, associated in the Pali Canon with meditation and death. It may also be the result of ketosis brought on by prolonged water fasting.

[225] D 17.2.11.

[226] D 17.2.13.

Discourse on Janavasabha

Digha Nikaya 18

Country: Vajji
Locale: Brick House in Nadika
Speakers: Ananda, the Buddha, Janavasabha

The Buddha is staying at the Brick House in Nadika, where he also stayed in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta.[227] The Buddha divines the rebirths of many people in that community. This sutta elaborates that story, as the previous sutta elaborated Ananda's objection to the Buddha dying near Kusinara. The Magadhans are not mentioned initially. Ananda points this out as a defect, since many Maghadans are Buddhist, including King Bimbisara, recently killed by his son, Ajatasattu. Ananda also notes that the Buddha became enlightened in Magadha, at Bodh Gaya. The ability to discern the karmic fate of individuals is the ninth power of a buddha, called the Divine Eye.

After completing his alms round, perhaps late in the morning or just after noon, the Buddha sits down to meditate in the Brick House and undertakes to divine the future lot and destiny of the Magadhans as Ananda requested, including King Bimbisara. In the early evening, when the sun is still able to cast a shadow, the Buddha comes out and sits in the shade. Ananda comes to him and

[227] D 16.

notes that his face is "bright and shining," a characteristic that is associated in other suttas with spiritual purity. Here Ananda associates it with the Buddha's mind being tranquil.

The Buddha tells him that during his meditation he heard the voice of a *yaksha,* a class of nature spirit that guards natural treasures hidden in the earth and tree roots. There are two kinds of *yaksha.* This one is a nature fairy, associated with woods and mountains. (A darker version is a kind of ghost that haunts wilderness areas and waylays and devours travellers.) In Buddhist cosmology, they attend Vessavana, the Guardian of the North, in the realm of the Four Great Kings, next above our own world.

The *yaksha* identifies himself as Janavasabha. Afterward, the Buddha asks Ananda if he knows of him. Although Ananda does not, for some reason the name excites in him both fear and respect. The *yaksha* appears before the Buddha, in what is termed a "noble vision," and identifies himself as the dead King Bimbisara. He tells the Buddha that this is his seventh rebirth in the realm of the Four Great Kings, as a king and messenger of the Guardian of the North. Interestingly, Bimbisara/Janavasabha mentions that he can recall fourteen rebirths. Thus, though devas typically recall their past lives, such recall is apparently limited, presumably according to their spiritual development, corresponding to their station in the deva worlds. People only rarely recall their past lives.[228]

Bimbisara/Janavasabha identifies himself to the Buddha as a stream entrant, and tells the Buddha that he desires to become a "once-returner." A once-returner has only one human rebirth remaining before achieving emancipation. The Buddha is astonished by Bimbisara/Janavasabha's claim: On what grounds can he know of such an attainment? *Bimbisara/Janavasabha says that it is by the Buddha's teaching that he knows,* referring perhaps to the Mirror of Dharma practice described in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta, whereby one knows that one has entered the stream. The stream entrant is identified as being free from all future states of woe and subhuman

[228] See Stevenson, *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation.*

rebirths by having stricken off the three fetters of belief in a self; belief in rites, rituals, and codes of ethics; uncaused salvation; and doubt.

Bimbisara proceeds to tell the Buddha the story of an assembly of the devas in the realm of the Thirty-Three on the full moon *uposatha* day of the rainy season (*vassa*), probably in July, "in earlier times." Seated in the Sudhamma Hall ('Hall of Good Counsel'), including many other devas and devas of the realm of the Four Great Kings and 2,400 devas who were Magadhan followers of the Buddha of that time. The faces of the devas that were followers of the Buddha were brighter than the rest, causing the thirty-three devas to rejoice that *the ranks of the devas are increasing while the ranks of the anti-gods are decreasing*.

THE WAR OF THE GODS

To unpack the reference to the divine beings and the anti-gods, we must examine the war between them. The anti-gods initially inhabited the realm of the Thirty-Three, the polar centre of the physical universe. However, the divine beings expelled them long ago due to their competitive and desirous nature—a story echoed in the Judaic legend of the fall, told from the perspective of the victors. The chief of this realm, Sakra, a Buddhist variation of the Hindu god Indra, led the expulsion. Despite this, the realm of the Thirty-Three is still a beneficent dimension. Its inhabitants are also involved in human affairs.

This realm resembles the "heaven" of the Judaic tradition, while one might compare the realm of the anti-gods to "hell." Many ancient peoples believed that gods and supernatural beings dwell invisibly among us but can assume physical form when it suits them, a belief which gave rise to the custom of hospitality.

While humans live on the four great continents surrounding Mount Meru, the anti-gods inhabit the ocean encircling its base. Early interpreters (erroneously) interpreted the term asura as "non-sura," meaning not a sura, or a divine being. The word deva means "celestial dweller" or "star." Translators often describe the anti-gods

as Titans, demigods, or demons, marked by a nature dominated by passions such as wrath, pride, envy, and bellicosity, despite their spiritual status. Ego, force, and violence rule them. Some anti-gods are actually malevolent, while others exhibit a surprising degree of spiritual awareness.

Like all six classes of sentient beings in Buddhist cosmology, anti-gods can be reborn as humans, and humans may be reborn as anti-gods. Since both humans and anti-gods inhabit the same plane—the one world ocean surrounding Mount Meru, separated only by a thin veil—there is considerable friction between them. The anti-gods enjoy a more pleasurable existence than humans enjoy but envy of the spiritual beings plagues them.

The origins of the anti-gods lie in the higher realms of the Buddhist cosmic hierarchy. They once inhabited the realm of the Thirty-Three at the peak of Mount Meru but were cast down due to their drunkenness, thus setting the stage for the ongoing conflict between the anti-gods and the divine beings. Humans become embroiled in this conflict as well.

Anti-gods perceive divine beings in much the same way that humans and animals perceive each other. While humans and animals tend to perceive one another consistently, humans perceive divine beings and anti-gods only rarely. The anti-gods are often confused with hell beings, though they are not always evil. In the Rig Veda (1500–1000 BCE), the anti-gods were considered a type of divine being, such as Asura Varuna, the god of the celestial ocean, law, and order, as well as nature. The term asura was originally associated with individual divine beings, not a distinct class of beings. It was only during the late Vedic period (1000–500 BCE) that anti-gods became a separate class of spiritual being.

Initially, the anti-gods were older, stronger, and beneficent siblings of the divine beings. However, during the later Vedic period, a conflict arose between the anti-gods and the divine beings, with the anti-gods often emerging victorious. The Bhagavad Gita paints the anti-gods as proud, arrogant, angry, harsh, and ignorant—traits that mirror a growing tension between the older, dominant cult of asura worship and the emerging cult of deva worship.

The anti-gods were non-anthropomorphic and formless gods, in contrast to the more anthropomorphic divine beings. They guarded the natural and moral laws of the cosmic order, comparable to the Buddhist concepts of dharma and karma. The deva worshippers, on the other hand, were concerned with power, might, fear, submission, and the status quo. Interestingly, it was during this late Vedic period that women were stripped of their traditional rights and relegated to the status of chattel—a shift the Buddha opposed, though it was reinstated after his passing by the arhants of the First Buddhist Council around 400 BCE.

This schism between the followers of the older anti-god tradition and the newer deva worshippers corresponds to a broader social divide in the late Vedic period, culminating in the renunciant counterculture of the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. The conflict between the anti-gods and divine beings reflects a deeper cosmic struggle, which is mirrored in later religions like Zoroastrianism and Christianity. In the Iranian tradition, the anti-gods, particularly Asura (Ahura) Mazda, the personification of wisdom, retained their privileged status, while they demonized the divine beings —a reversal of the story told in Hindu and Buddhist texts, though remarkably similar to the Hebrew myth of the fallen angels.

Many names of the anti-gods refer to natural abstractions, as seen in Native American spiritualism and the Indus Valley civilization. A new cult of deva worship rose during the late Vedic period, casting the anti-gods as demonic and persecuting the older asura worshippers. The new deva worshippers supported the Brahmanic caste system and were often misogynistic. This division is mythologized in the historical conflict between the two groups, with the deva worshippers achieving pre-eminence in the eastern part of the Indian subcontinent, while the asura worshippers held on to their prestige in the west, interestingly, eventually forming the foundation of Zoroastrianism in Iran, with Ahura Mazda at its head.

An epic mythic war between the two classes of deities marked this period. The divine beings cast the anti-gods, associated with vast cosmic and natural powers, down into the cosmic ocean.

There, they, along with the divine beings, churn the soma (amrita), the divine nectar of timelessness. There is clearly much more to unpack here.

If we identify the divine beings of the Thirty-Three with the force of negentropy, the tendency to order, and the realm of the anti-gods with the force of entropy, the tendency to disorder or chaos, we see that the war of the divine beings and the anti-gods is a metaphor for the dualistic dynamic of the universe, raging between energy-information-negentropy and matter-ignorance-entropy. Thus, the teaching represents the action of the negentropic principle in a universe ruled by entropy. R. Buckminster Fuller might be the first modern to recognize that humans, in fact, fulfil a natural negentropic function in the universe.

THE ASSEMBLY OF THE DEVAS

In the course of their deliberations, a light appears in the north. Sakra declares, "when such signs are seen, such light is seen and such radiance shines forth, Brahma will appear."[229] This association of the imminent appearance of the chief of the Brahma worlds with unpredictable luminous phenomena is familiar. Reminiscent of the near-death phenomenon (NDE), all the devas declare, "Let us find out what comes of this radiance, and having found the truth of it, *we will go towards it"*[230] (italics added). *Kumara* also means 'gold,' and the sutta says that he outshone the devas as a gold statue outshines the human figure.

The Brahma Sanat Kumara appears before the Assembly of the Thirty-Three Gods. His name means 'Eternal Child.' In himself, Sanat Kumara is imperceptible but, by assuming a coarse form, he is able to appear to the Assembly. Brilliant to behold, he outshines all the other devas and encourages them to follow the *Buddhadharma.*

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[229] D 18.15.
[230] D 18.16.

The form that Sanat Kumara assumes is that of Pancasikha, a male youth beloved of the gods, floating cross-legged in the air, who praises the Buddha and the dharma. Since no one offers him a seat, he multiplies himself into thirty-three duplicates of his physical form, each of which sits down on the seat of each of the Thirty-Three Gods. Therefore, each god-form assumes the god-form of Sanat Kumara/Pancasikha. He declares that those who take refuge in the Three Jewels and follow the precepts will be reborn in one of the realms of the World of Sense Desires but no lower than the Four Great Kings. This is unusual in that other suttas declare that human rebirth is the best for an aspirant, but perhaps that this is included is implicit in the fact that he is a stream entrant. The voice of Brahma is described as distinct, intelligible, pleasant, attractive, compact, concise, deep, and resonant. Each of the thirty-three devas, on whose seats Sanat Kumara is sitting, feels that he speaks to them alone.

THE FOUR ROADS TO POWER

Sanat Kumara reunifies his form and sits on the seat of Sakra. He declares that the Buddha has discovered the Four Roads to Power. These consist of four practices:

1. Concentration of Intention;
2. Concentration of Energy;
3. Concentration of Consciousness; and
4. Concentration of Inquiry.

Each of these practices is accompanied by an effort of will. Sanat Kumara presents this practice as the universal key to realization practised by all ascetics and Brahmans of the past, present, and future. *Thus, here we have in this sutta a declaration of the essential key of dharma practice*. Moreover, these practices are all directed toward the development of psychic powers (*iddhis*) in addition to realization. Here we see another sign of a proto-tantric element in the Pali Canon.

THE THREE GATEWAYS TO BLISS

He declares the three gateways to the bliss of a Buddha:

- **Disassociation from sense desires** and unwholesome conditions;
- **Allaying the gross tendencies** of body, speech, and mind; and
- **Knowing what is right and wrong,** based on the Law of Karma.

The three gateways to bliss develop gladness and knowledge.

THE FOUR FOUNDATIONS OF AWARENESS

He declares the Four Foundations of Awareness, in which one contemplates:

- Body as body;
- Feelings as feelings;
- Mind as mind; and
- Mind-objects as mind-objects.

The Four Foundations of Awareness develop concentration, calm, serenity, knowledge, and vision.

THE SEVEN REQUISITES OF CONCENTRATION

He declares the Seven Requisites of Concentration:

1. Right View;
2. Right Thought;
3. Right Speech;
4. Right Action;
5. Right Livelihood;
6. Right Effort; and
7. Right Awareness.

The similarity to the Noble Eightfold Path is obvious. A question that arises with respect to the Noble Eightfold Path is the significance of the numbered sequence as a sequence, i.e., do the tasks corresponding to the "limbs" of the Noble Eightfold Path represent a gradual path? This may be contrasted with the Threefold Division, attributed to the nun Dhammadinna, which seems to imply a different order from the Noble Eightfold Path. I would note the strong emphasis on the *sequence* of the Seven Requisites for Concentration, which clearly correspond to the *stages* of the Noble Eightfold Path. *Each requisite establishes the necessary basis for the next, so the requisites clearly must be attained in order,* confirming Peter Masefield's hypothesis that the proper sequence of the Threefold Division is Wisdom, Morality, and Meditation, culminating in the higher concentration, knowledge, and liberation.[231] From Right Awareness arise Right Concentration, Right Knowledge, and Right Liberation, corresponding to the eighth limb of the Noble Eightfold Path, Right Concentration. The Seven Requisites of Concentration give us greater insight into the construction of the Noble Eightfold Path.

He declares that the dharma is timeless, capable of rational apprehension and analysis by each individual for themselves, and progressive. He reiterates a continuous refrain of the Pali Canon, "Open are the doors of the Deathless" (*aparuta amatassa dvara'ti*), which decisively negates any notion that the Buddha taught anything less than personal immortality: "For indeed, my Lords, the Dhamma is well-proclaimed by the Lord, visible here and now, timeless, inviting inspection, leading onward, to be comprehended by the wise, each one for him or herself, and, too, the doors to the

[231] Hirakawa Akira makes the interesting suggestion that the order—morality, meditation, wisdom—is in order of *importance* from least to greatest (see *A History of Indian Buddhism from Sakyamuni to Early Mahayana,* p. 25). This confirms my hypothesis in a different way. I am much obliged to Akira for this insight.

Deathless are open."[232] Access to the doors to the Deathless seems to be non-gender-specific and evolutionary.

Finally, Sanat Kumara affirms the doctrine of the Buddha lineage, that buddhas arose in the past and will arise again in the future.

CONCLUSION

Unlike most suttas in the Pali Canon, this sutta is an explicit spirit teaching, like similar productions in Tibetan Buddhist and Taoist traditions. The teaching of Sanat Kumara is transmitted to the thirty-three devas, who transmit it to Vessavana, who relates it to his followers, including Janavasabha. Janavasabha is King Bimbisara of Magadha, reborn as a king in the realm of the Four Great Kings. Janavasabha, noticing (to a higher dimensional being, the minds of people are open books) what the Buddha is thinking about (i.e., the future rebirths of the Magadhans, including King Bimbisara), he transmits it to the Buddha, who confirms its coherence with his own realization and transmits it to Ananda. Ananda transmits it to the male and female monastics and lay followers or householders, emphasizing the inclusion of both genders. Clearly, the concept of initiatory transmission is implied, which we also find in later traditions of the tantric type especially.

The end of the sutta is also unique. Most suttas end with the phrase "Thus the Lord spoke" or an utterance or an incident, often a conversion, an awakening, or a summary poem. The Janavasabha Sutta ends with the words, "And so the holy life waxed mighty and prospered and spread widely as it was proclaimed among mankind."[233] One expects this sort of revelatory tone from a communication of this type. This sutta is further confirmation of a proto-tantric thread in the Pali Canon.

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[232] D 18.27.
[233] D 18.29.

Discourse on Mahagovinda

Digha Nikaya 19

Country: Magadha
Locale: Vulture's Peak, Rajagaha
Speakers: Pancasikha, the Buddha

In this sutta, the Buddha is staying at Vulture's Peak in Rajagaha, the same place as at the opening of the Mahaparinibbana Sutta.[234] Located near the village of Devrajnagar, it consists of four caves and is unique in the world for the large number of vultures that congregate there.

Shortly before sunrise, Pancasikha appears as a "splendid radiance." This is the same Pancasikha as in the previous sutta, described as a young boy, beloved by the devas. Here we learn that he is a *gandhabba,* an attendant of Dhrtarastra, the Guardian of the East and god of music, harmony, and compassion, in the realm of the Four Great Kings. Sanat Kumara chooses to appear to the devas of the realm of the Thirty-Three Gods as the lowest rank of deva. Pancasikha is also a messenger between the realm of the Thirty-Three and the Four Great Kings, who together monitor human affairs, and probably a musician too. Gandhabbas are aerial, musical, and associated with nature, rather like fairies. His name means 'five top-knots,' alluding to the style of his hair, which he wears in the

[234] D 16.

same style as when he died as a young boy. Pancasikha has some of the characteristics of Mercury in the Greek pantheon.

Pancasikha comes to the Buddha in his capacity as messenger, conveying to him the same story that we heard in the previous sutta in which Sakra, the chief of the realm of the Thirty-Three, praises the Buddha in eight statements, in which he declares that the Buddha is supreme among teachers:

1. in compassion for the world.
2. for the quality of his dharma, described as "here and now, timeless, inviting inspection, leading onward, to be realized by the wise each one for himself"[235]—a description that we encountered in sutta 18.
3. for the quality of his moral and ethical teachings.
4. for his explanation of Buddhist practice.
5. for the quality of his sangha.
6. for good reputation without conceit on his part.
7. for the mutual coherence of his speech and his actions, a quality we noted in sutta 16, where King Ajatasattu attempts to use the Buddha as an oracle to divine the outcome of his proposed war with the Vajjians.
8. for certainty of mind.

In response to such praise, some gods exclaim, "Oh, if only four fully enlightened buddhas were to arise in the world, and teach Dhamma just like the Blessed Lord."[236] I have suggested that the sutta in which this assembly is documented describes a previous age. However, this passage suggests that the Buddha of that time is in fact Kakusandha, who is succeeded by three buddhas—Konagamma, Kassapa, and Gotama—and who is to be followed by Maitreya, five buddhas in all. Such an age is both rare and fortunate.

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[235] D 19.6.
[236] D 19.13.

Sakra sets forth an important principle of Buddhist cosmology: that only one Buddha can exist in a single "world-system" at any time. What this means in the context of modern cosmology is somewhat obscure. Is a "world-system" a dharma age, a planet, a solar system, a galaxy, a universe, or even a multiverse? All these are world-systems, or kalpas.

Sanat Kumara appears as in the previous sutta. This time, Sanat Kumara asks the thirty-three gods, "For how long has the Blessed Lord been one of mighty wisdom,"[237] and proceeds to tell a tale based on that theme.

The story is that of King Disampati, whose religious advisor (*purohita*) is called the Steward (Govinda, lit. 'cowherd,' an epithet of Krishna). Although this is a Brahmanic religious office, the Steward is also an expert in business and manages all the king's worldly affairs too. The king's son's name is Renu, and the Steward's son is Jotipala. Together with six other kshatriyas, they form a group of eight friends. The king is becoming something of a dissolute, and when he begins to abandon himself to the pleasures of the senses the Steward dies, to the king's regret. Renu advises Disampati to allow Jotipala to manage his affairs, to which the king agrees. Jotipala fulfils this royal function well, and becomes known as the Great Steward. As Disampati becomes decrepit with age and enters into his final dotage, Jotipala goes to the six friends and encourages them to approach Renu and suggest that he share the kingship with them after his father's death. After Disampati dies, the kshatriya assembly (another sign of nascent democracy) appoints Renu as a constitutional king, after which, like his father, he gives himself up to pleasure. Jahampati sends the six nobles to remind King Renu of his duty. Therefore, King Renu has Jahampati divide his kingdom—which seems to have been identical with the Indian subcontinent—into seven parts, keeping the central part for himself, and giving the remaining six parts to the six nobles.

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[237] D 19.28.

These become known as the seven Bharat kings, Bharata being the original term for India, after Bharata, the mythological emperor and founder of the Bharata dynasty. Thus, Jotipala becomes the Great Steward of the seven kings. He also teaches the mantras to seven notable Brahmans and seven hundred advanced students.

Jotipala himself becomes so notable that he acquires the reputation of conversing with God (Brahma). Although this is not in fact true, Jotipala decides to undertake the metta meditation during the rains retreat to try to live up to his own reputation. The metta meditation is the meditation on compassion, which the Buddha introduces in sutta 13 as the way to achieve Union with God, the religious goal of Brahmanism. Therefore, Jotipala takes leave of his forty wives and withdraws to a building that he builds east of the city to meditate; no one comes near him except to bring him food. However, at the end of this time, the Great Steward is disappointed that he has not experienced any success, whereupon Sanat Kumara appears before him in a vision, described as splendid, glorious, and divine. Jotipala offers a seat, water for the feet, and cakes to Sanat Kumara, who in return offers Jotipala a boon—an archetypal mytholological motif that occurs worldwide, and which underlies the *ngondro* practice of mandala offering in Tibetan Buddhism too.

Jotipala asks Sanat Kumara how mortals can achieve the deathless Brahma world, noting that he asks both for himself and for others. This is the Brahmanic view of the Brahma world, not the Buddhist view, which holds that all worlds and their inhabitants are subject to mortality. Sanat Kumara replies that to reach the deathless Brahma world he must abandon his possessions and family; live alone in the forest, at the foot of a tree, in a mountain glen, in a rocky cave, in a charnel ground, in the jungle, or on a heap of grass in the open; develop concentration; love the whole world; and abandon anger, lying, fraud, cheating, avarice, pride, jealousy, coveting, doubt, harming others, greed, hatred, stupor, delusion, and lust.

Jotipala goes to the king and resigns his office as Steward, whereupon the king declares that he will follow Jotipala into the homeless state. He compares Jotipala to a beryl, a semi-precious stone that

represents the Precious Jewel. Here it is a metaphor for awareness. The six nobles, however, try to bribe Jotipala, thinking that he is like other Brahmans of that time, first with money, then with women. When their attempts fail, they too declare that they will follow Jotipala into the homeless state if he is willing to wait seven years.

However, Jotipala refuses to wait seven years, declaring that wisdom is won by means of mantra (*mantaya*), which Walshe, following the commentary, glosses as "wisdom."[238] However, the literal meaning of this word is relevant here, because it reinforces other references to mantra yoga in the Pali Canon that clearly refer to the efficacy of mantra in addition to the salvific importance of wisdom. Finally, Jotipala agrees to wait seven days for the nobles to join him in the homeless state.

At the end of the seven days, Jotipala shaves off his hair and beard, dons yellow robes,[239] and enters into the homeless state. Note that putting on robes, which we associate with Buddhist monasticism, was in fact adopted by the Buddhists from the *samanas,* and that such renunciation does not require any organizational approval but is a purely personal decision. This is exactly what the Buddha does when he abandons the householder life, there being no sangha for him to join. Therefore, the Buddha himself is never actually a monastic.[240] Jotipala and Gotama are both self-ordained, which is the original form of ordination for the same reason that democracy is the original form of government in the Buddhist view. The seven kings, seven Brahmans, seven hundred

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[238] The Pali words for 'wisdom' and 'mantra' (*manta*) are identical except for a lengthening of the final 'a.' Such puns seem to be frequently ignored by translators. The original term for Tantra is *mantrayana* ('the way of mantra').

[239] The Pali word, *kasaya* or *kasava,* refers to a reddish-yellow or orange coloured dye. A nearly identical word except for the lengthening of the first 'a' refers to a yellowish shade of brown. Sometimes this is translated as 'ochre' or 'saffron.'

[240] According to the Jataka, the Bodhisattva is never described as taking rebirth as a monastic, further differentiating him from the arhants. He takes rebirth as an ascetic frequently. See T.W. Rhys-Davids, *Buddhist Birth Stores,* Table VII, p. 246.

advanced students, forty wives, several thousand kshatriyas, several thousand Brahmans, and several thousand householders, including some prostitutes, join him in this state.

Jotipala wanders the streets, begging for food and practising metta. Because of his fame and influence, many people are reborn in a higher state, ranging from the *gandhabbas* in the realm of the Four Great Kings to the Brahma world itself.

Pancasikha asks the Buddha if he remembers this story. The Buddha affirms that he does, and that he was Jotipala in that life. Thus, the Mahagovinda Sutta is a past life story of the Buddha, which may also be found in the Jatakas. However, he declares,

> *that* holy life does not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to superknowledge, to enlightenment, to Nirvana, but only to birth in the Brahma-world, whereas my holy life leads unfailingly to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to superknowledge, to enlightenment, to Nirvana. This is the Noble Eightfold Path, namely Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration. (61)

Therefore, the Buddha reveals to Pancasikha the dharma that goes beyond Brahmanism and leads to the qualitatively ultimate attainment, transcendent emancipation from all of samsara itself. The Buddha further declares that those followers have "fully mastered my teaching" who achieve "superknowledge" (gnosis),[241] the destruction of the corruptions, and uncorrupted freedom of heart and mind, compassion and awareness. He then recapitulates the various gradations of attainment, including (1) rebirth as a deva, (2) once-returners, and (3) stream entrants, achieved by the destruction of (1) the five lower fetters, (2) the three fetters and the reduction of greed, hatred, and delusion, and (3) the destruction of three fetters, respectively. The three fetters refer to belief in a self, doubt,

[241] D 19.62.

and attachment to rites and rituals. Adding sensual desire and anger to these make the five lower fetters.

The Great Meeting

Digha Nikaya 20

Country: Shakya
Locale: Great Forest, Kapilavastu
Speaker: the Buddha

The Buddha is in the Great Forest of Kapilavastu, his home town. The Buddha promised his father, Suddhodana, to return to Kapilavastu after his enlightenment. The Buddha returns to Kapilavastu four years later too, so this sutta may describe the occasion of his initial or subsequent return. We know that the Pali Canon refers to devas who inhabit or visit the earth plane. Here again we find this motif. The sutta says that devas from the ten world systems "frequently" visit the Buddha and the sangha at Kapilavastu. Walshe provides no explanation except to note that Rhys Davids's translation of "10,000 world systems" is wrong (the reference to ten thousand world systems refers to the horizontal extension of samsara, whereas the present context is vertical; nevertheless, the repetition of the number ten is not accidental. The ten world systems suggest the ten *sephiroth* of the Cabala).

How the thirty-one planes of existence may be divided into ten is speculative. We know from other texts that there is communication between humans and devas in the realms above the earth plane, including the Four Great Kings up to the Brahma realms. The devas of the Formless realm have no business with people, and no physical shape or location. This leaves four major realms of the *Rupaloka,* which, together with the six realms of the *Kamaloka,* make up ten "world-systems."

The ten world systems and the Cabalistic Tree of Life

	Realms (*lokas*)	***Sephiroth***	**Meaning of *sephiroth***
Rupaloka			
1.	Five Pure Abodes (home of arhants-to-be)	*Keter*	Crown
2.	The Glorious Devas	*Chokhmah*	Wisdom
3.	Radiant Devas (original home of humanity)	*Binah*	Understanding
4.	Brahma Devas (goal of the Brahmans)	*Chesed*	Compassion
Kamaloka			
5.	Devas Who Appropriate the Work of Others	*Geburah*	Judgment
6.	Devas Who Delight in Made Shapes	*Tiferet*	Adornment
7.	Satisfied Devas (Tusita) (home of bodhisattvas)	*Netzach*	Victory
8.	The 33 Gods (original home of anti-gods)	*Hod*	Splendour
9.	Yama Devas	*Yesod*	Foundation
10.	The Four Great Kings	*Malkuth*	Kingdom

The worlds of manifestation are also divided into six classes of beings. *The Pali mentions four devas of the Pure Abodes—the place where non-returners are reborn before they attain nirvana—that resolve to visit the Buddha.* The Sanskrit version of this sutta mentions four female devas from the Brahma world. These devas appear instantaneously before the Buddha and praise the sangha in verse. The sangha is referred to as "the unconquered brotherhood" and "spotless seers, like well-trained elephants," referring to their "concentrated minds." They use the interesting metaphor, "bars and barriers broken, the threshold stone of lust torn up,"[242] referring to the stone that constitutes the sill of a doorway or, perhaps, the wall of a house. *The doctrine is expressed that those who take refuge in the Buddha, not referring to the dharma or the sangha in the familiar*

[242] D 20.3.

threefold formula, will not be reborn in a lower world but will be reborn as devas.

The Buddha declares that he will teach the monastics regarding the devas of the ten world systems. It seems to be an oft-repeated question whether devas can attain nirvana. We know that the devas of the Five Pure Abodes attain nirvana from the deva realms so, as with women, we know that it is possible, but the suttas also state that it is a rare and difficult thing for them to do so because of their great happiness and ease. Nevertheless, we know that the devas rejoice when a buddha-to-be is born and that there are devas who follow the dharma.

The sutta describes a collective vision of numbers of devas, ranging from hundreds or thousands to innumerable, "all around." Apparently, higher dimensional beings do not fill space in the same way as physical objects, including people. Mass visionary perceptions of luminous phenomena are also part of the UFO phenomenon. The sutta implies that experiences of this type are only available to advanced people like the Buddha and his monastics, and that the experience varies according to the quality of consciousness of the percipient. To cite a well-researched example, in the vision of Fatima (1917), some saw nothing, but others saw much more in varying degrees. The cameras picked up nothing. *Superhuman vision must be activated by striving.* Reality is constructed by consciously directed intention. The quality of the seer is thus described:

> Those who dwell composed and resolute
> Like lions in mountain-caves, have overcome
> Hair-raising fear and dread, their minds
> White and pure, unstained and calm. (5)

The Buddha conquered fear in the forest during his six years of asceticism, and prescribes going into the forest to meditate for this purpose. The Buddha prescribes mantras for these renunciates, another demonstration of the efficacy and use of mantras.

The Buddha proceeds to describe the deva hosts as they appear before the sangha. Walshe compares the list to Tolkien's *Lord of the*

Rings. The act of naming has the archaic archetypal significance of creating. The description begins with numbers of *yakshas,* earth-bound devas who also inhabit the realm of the Four Great Kings. The *yaksha* Janavasabhava appears in sutta 18. There are two sorts of *yaksha.* One type is an inoffensive, even beneficent, nature fairy, associated with woods and mountains. The other type appears as a ghost or ogre that haunts the wilderness and attacks and devours travellers. These *yakshas* originate in Kapilavastu, the Himalayas, and Mount Sata. These also appear to be followers of Kapila, the founder of Kapilavastu. Another group from Rajagaha are said to be followers of the rishi Vessamitta. A third group, also from Rajagaha, follows Kumbhira. Kumbhira is the chief of the *kumbhandas*—dwarfish, misshapen spirits, traditionally represented with big stomachs (or testes). They are a sub-type of *yaksha* and inhabit the southern part of the realm of the Four Great Kings, under Virulhaka, the guardian of that direction. *Here again we see the Buddhist idea that some devas are living invisibly among us here on the earth.*

The Buddha proceeds to describe the realm of the Four Great Kings, next above the earth-plane, including the names of the Four Great Kings themselves, who guard the four directions, and the names of their vassals, described, interestingly, as "skilled deceivers." These include beings like Matali, the devas' charioteer. Other beings of many different sorts appear, including nagas, great snake spirits; fierce *garuda* birds with intelligence and social order, which, like the Brahmans, are referred to as "twice-born"; and even the anti-gods, who were cast out of the realm of the Thirty-Three by Indra, described as "ocean dwellers now, in magic skilled." The Buddha refers to devas of the elements, water, earth, fire, and wind; Soma, the god of the primordial mind-altering sacrament of the rishis that inspired the Veda; devas of the moon and the sun; constellation gods, clearly referring to the astrological signs of the zodiac; "sprites of clouds"; "beings manlike and more than manlike"; Pajunna the Thunderer, who causes rain; and gods of flame (*asavas*). Some of the names are recognizable as referring to the lower realms of what we know as the thirty-one planes of existence: the

brahmas, including Harita, the ancestor of the Brahman lineage, and Sanat Kumara, who appears to the assembly of the Thirty-Three; "those who delight in shapes they've made"; "those who seize on others' work"; the Tusita realm; Yama, the lord of the Yama realm; Sakra, the lord of the realm of the Thirty-Three; and the anti-god realm in the one world ocean. The overall impression is one of the universal profligacy of life at all different stages and degrees of conscious development, as well as the universal tendency to labelling and organization that seems to be the essential nature of sentient life itself.

So the devas, the Buddha, and the monastics are all arrayed in perfect splendour, when Mara comes, here called "the Black one," with his army. Mara shouts, "Come on, seize and bind them all. With lust we'll catch them all. Surround them all about. Let none escape, whoever he may be."[243]

This situation makes it clear that Mara's project is to enslave humanity to samsara through desirous attachment. He is, one might say, the "personification" of desirous attachment. The military metaphor is also clear. The field of desire is conflicted. "Competitive," a social Darwinist might say. However, Mara falls back, "enraged but powerless," for there is no basis for lust to take hold in this assembly:

> And Mara's hosts drew back from those on whom
> Neither lust nor fear could gain a hold.
> Victorious, transcending fear, they've won:
> His followers rejoice with all the worlds. (22)

The reference to fear is interesting. Mara is usually associated with lust, but here he is also associated with fear, hence the significance of the meditation on fear. Overcoming fear and overcoming lust are related, so we may also say that fear, apparently the converse of desirous attachment, is really its corollary and complement and,

[243] D 20.21.

perhaps, even its essence. Thus, if we overcome the fear of loss, then we can overcome the desire to control and possess.

This sutta has the same numinous character as sutta 19, which we called a spirit communication, and seems to be another example of a similar type. It seems then that such phenomena appear early on in the development of the Buddhist cultus, much like the Gnostic Christian texts.

SUMMARY OF DOCTRINES

- The devas visit the Buddha and he learns from them.
- Deva travel is instantaneous.
- Those who take refuge in the Buddha will not experience a lower rebirth.
- Devas manifest as luminous aerial phenomena.
- Devas are only visible to those of refined awareness.
- The meditation that destroys fear is part of the Buddhist path of dispassion.
- Some devas live invisibly among people on Earth.
- The anti-gods are skilled in the practice of magic or sorcery.
- Desirous attachment, fear, and war are interrelated.

Sakka's Questions

Digha Nikaya 21

Country: Magadha
Locale: Indasala Cave, Mt. Vediya, near Ambasanda, east of Rajagaha
Speakers: Sakra, Pancasikha, the Buddha

The Buddha is staying in Indasala Cave. The sutta identifies the exact location of this cave on Mount Vediya, near a village called Ambasanda, east of Rajagaha, in the country of Magadha. I can do no better than to quote the description from the BuddhaNet website:

> This remote and beautiful cave is the place where the Buddha delivered one of his most profound discourses, the Sakkapanha Sutta. He also uttered verses 206, 207 and 208 of the Dhammapada while staying here. Followers of Tibetan Buddhism will be interested to know that Buddhasrijnana, the famous commentator on the Guhyasamaja Tantra also once lived in this cave. The Indasala Cave is at the base of a sheer cliff halfway up the side of Giriyek Mountain."[244]

Further up on the very top of the mountain is the Hansa Stupa, the most complete stupa still existing in India. Hiuen Tsiang visited this stupa and recorded the interesting story behind its construction.

This sutta is another segue from sutta 18, in which Sakra and, ultimately, Sanat Kumara, in the form of the young boy Pancasikha,

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[244] Buddha Dharma Education Association, "Indasala Cave."

preside over a council of the devas of the realm of the Thirty-Three. Sakra resolves to visit the Buddha in order to learn the secret of success in the spiritual quest and, discerning his location,[245] Sakra informs the gods of the realm of the Thirty-Three of his intention and invites Pancasikha along. Pancasikha, who is a musician, brings his yellow *beluva*-wood lute. Sakra and Pancasikha, as Sakra's attendant, surrounded by the thirty-three gods, instantly transport themselves to Mount Vediya. They appear as an aerial luminous display: "Then a tremendous light shone over Mount Vediya, illuminating the village of Ambasanda."[246] Apparently, this display is so bright that the inhabitants of neighbouring villages are filled with dread. Once again we see the now familiar UFO phenomenology, right down to such minute details as the mountain appearing to be on fire—a common UFO report—as well as the universal apprehension of dread.

Sakra is concerned that he might not be able to approach the Buddha, who is "enjoying the bliss of meditation" in seclusion, so he suggests to Pancasikha, who was renowned among the gods for his beauty, that he approach the Buddha and *charm* him. The Pali word is *pasidati*, from *pa* + *sad*. The dictionary meaning is 'to become bright,' 'to brighten up,' 'to be purified,' 'reconciled,' or 'pleased'; 'to be clear and calm,' 'to become of peaceful heart'; 'to find one's satisfaction in,' 'to have faith.' Related words refer to 'gladdening,' 'inclining one's heart,' 'adorning,' 'decorating,' etc. The Sanskrit *prasad* means 'to purify,' 'become clear or distinct,' 'gladden,' 'fall into the power of,' 'become satisfied,' 'pleased,' or 'glad'; 'make serene'; 'settle down'; 'be gracious or kind'; 'grow clear and bright'; 'be successful'; 'become placid or tranquil'; 'settle down,' 'gladden,' 'render clam,' 'make clear,' 'soothe,' 'ask a person to or for,' and 'make serene.'

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[245] Although this is widely interpreted as an example of telepathy, it could describe querying a computer database just as well.

[246] D 21.1.3.

Consequently, Pancasikha goes to the cave with his lute; he stands near the entrance, plays his lute, and sings a song to the Buddha of the Buddha, the dharma, the arhants, and love. Walshe refers to "attracting the ear" of the Buddha, which creates a rather odd image. Rhys Davids has "win over." In any case, Pancasikha's intention is to charm the Buddha with his song as a prelude to Sakra's visit. Although nothing untoward is implied, it is hard to escape the note of homoeroticism. The romantic friendship of David and Jonathan in the Book of Samuel of the Hebrew Bible comes to mind. David is also a musician and singer.

The song praises the beauty of Bhadda Suriyavaccasa, the daughter of Timbaru, who are mentioned in sutta 20 in the list of the deva hosts who visit the Buddha and the monastics in Kapilavastu. Her name means 'sunshine.' Pancasikha compares her to the dharma and entreats her for release from the flames of desire, which he proposes to expunge by plunging into her sweet bosom like an elephant plunging into a pool of water.[247] The Buddha is also compared to an elephant in the Pali Canon, with erotic overtones as discussed by John Powers in *A Bull of a Man.* Declaring that his mind is transformed by his love of her:

> Come, embrace me, maiden fair of thighs,
> Seize and hold me with your lovely eyes,
> Take me in your arms, it's all I ask.
> My desire was slight at first, O maid
> Of waving tresses, but it grew apace,
> As grow the gifts that Arahants receive. (1.5)[248]

However, Bhadda is already smitten by Sikhaddi, the son of Matali the charioteer. Pancasikha expresses the wish that he might convert his accrued merit (by giving to the sangha) into her love,

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[247] The phallic connotation of the elephant is not lost on us either.

[248] This is not the only erotic reference in the Pali Canon. See, e.g., Horner, *Book of the Discipline,* Vol. 1, pp. 349–72.

an interesting transposition of the transfer of merit principle, which he seeks with the same ardour as the Buddha seeks immortality (deathlessness).[249] He compares the bliss of enlightenment to actual converse with Suriyavaccasa that, he says, he craves. Alternatively, Pancasikha suggests that Sakra might grant him the boon of her love.

This remarkable passage has many parallels in Mahayana and Vajrayana, with their veneration for female bodhisattvas; dakinis, female dancing spirits; and the Tibetan *yabyum* (lit. 'father-mother'), depicted as a buddha or a bodhisattva in sexual union with a female consort (*shakti*), representing the primordial union of wisdom and compassion, heart and mind. Interestingly, Bhadda is also associated with dancing in the sutta. We may regard this song as an early precursor of the cult of Tara, for example, as well as the tantric doctrine that the force of desire can be directly transmuted into enlightenment itself. The association of erotic feeling and enlightenment is unmistakable. This has correspondences in other traditions, too, where the spiritual idea assumes a female form, including the Shekinah (Judaism); Sophia (the Holy Spirit) and the Virgin Mary (Christianity), the latter evidenced in the cult of Mariolatry; numerous similar female figures in Gnosticism and Sufism; the Shakti in Hinduism in all her multitudinous guises; and the female bodhisattvas of Mahayana and Vajrayana. In the earth-touching gesture the Buddha calls upon the deva of the earth (usually represented as female) to attest to the fact of his enlightenment. The sutta seems definitely non-Buddhist to us, yet here it is, included in the Pali Canon, despite the redaction of the Sri Lankan monastics who gave it its final shape and, to all appearances, inserted pious forgeries into the Pali Canon to convince one that the Buddha was a misogynist. It is considered one of the most profound suttas of the Pali Canon, like the Song of Solomon of the Hebrew Bible, or Aurobindo's *Savitri*.

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[249] According to tradition, this sutta was uttered shortly before the Buddha's enlightenment.

Rousing from his meditation, the Buddha compliments Pancasikha for the pleasing harmony of his voice and music. The Buddha asks Pancasikha when he composed this song. Pancasikha tells him that it was when the Buddha was dwelling on the bank of the river Neranjara, near the goatherd's banyan tree, shortly before the Buddha's enlightenment experience. Apparently, the song is inspired by Pancasikha's unrequited love for Bhadda, the daughter of King Timbaru. Because of the song, Pancasikha finally wins her love through their shared love for the Buddha.

Having broken the ice, as it were, or smoothed the way, Pancasikha asks the Buddha if Sakra may come. The Buddha consents, and Sakra and the thirty-three gods enter the cave and pay homage to the Buddha. There is very much a sense of transition; the cave is sacralized, not merely by the presence of the Buddha, but by his presence in the act of meditating, a spiritual gestation culminating in the emergence of the Buddha as a spiritual rebirth. The cave also is a womb. The cave itself becomes resplendent, illuminated by the worshipful presence of the devas.

There in the Indasala Cave the rough passages become smooth, the narrow parts become wide, and in the pitch-dark cavern it becomes bright, owing to the power of the devas, clearly alluding to the birth symbolism of the yoni.

The Buddha, in return, utters a variation of the famous aphorism, popularized by the Dalai Lama, "May [all beings] be happy, for they all desire happiness."[250] The Buddha greets Sakra using an epithet of Indra. Sakra reiterates his statement, made in sutta 18, that when a tathagata arises in the world the numbers of devas increase and the number of anti-gods decrease.

Sakra then tells the Buddha the story of a Shakyan girl named Gopika and a resident of Kapilavastu, whose faith and moral restraint cause her to aspire to be born in the higher state of a man. She is in fact reborn as a male in the "Threefold Heaven," another name for the realm of the Thirty-Three, as Gopaka the devas' son.

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[250] D 21.1.8.

She rebukes three monastics who are born as mere *gandhabbas*, the lowest possible deva rebirth, because of their addiction to sensuality. Because of her rebuke, so intense is their shame that two of these instantaneously attain awareness and after a life of aspiration are reborn in the Brahma world, whereas the third remains addicted to sensuality. She reiterates that the dharma must be realized, "each for himself," which we have also heard in other suttas. The point of this story seems to be that a devout female householder or, indeed, any lower-born spiritual being can attain a higher spiritual state than a male monastic or higher-born spiritual being who, though they appear to follow the Buddhist rule, are in fact addicted to sensuality. Therefore, *the somewhat unusual point of this story is that being a male monastic is no guarantee of realization.* On the other hand, a female householder is not necessarily unrealized. This story universalizes the same principle by which the Buddha repudiated the caste system.[251]

> A sorry sight it is to see
> One's Dhamma-fellows sunk so low
> That, gandhabba-spirits, you
> But come to wait upon the gods,
> While as for me—I am transformed.
> From household life, and female, I
> Am now reborn a male, a god,
> Rejoicing in celestial bliss. (1.12)

The lesson is that those who do not follow the Buddhist way will be reborn as menials.

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[251] Sakra specifically associates meditation ("deep absorption") with "spurn[ing] the gods." Cf. the Gnostic interpretation of Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Garden of Eden.

SAKRA'S QUESTIONS

Sakra asks the Buddha's leave to ask him ten questions, to which the Buddha assents, based on the fact of Sakra's purity.

1. By what fetters are the various classes of being bound into mutually self-destructive dysfunctional patterns?
2. What is the origin of jealousy and avarice?
3. What is the origin of like and dislike?
4. What is the origin of desire?
5. What is the origin of thinking?
6. What practice eliminates proliferation (*papanca)*?
7. What practice leads to self-restraint?
8. What practice leads to the control of the sense-faculties?
9. Do all ascetics and Brahmans teach the same doctrine and practise the same practice?
10. Are all ascetics and Brahmans proficient in the dharma?

These questions fall into three types. The first six questions give a new principle of interdependent origination. We have encountered this type of explanatory structure before in connection with how old age, suffering, and death result from ignorance, and how social discord results from craving. Here in the questions we learn how the fetters that bind us to hating and harming each other—social discord again, apparently an important theme to the Buddha—results from the ontological principle of "proliferation." Questions 6, 7, and 8 pertain to practice. Questions 9 and 10 pertain to the character of other ascetics and Brahmans.

A NEW INTERDEPENDENT ORIGINATION

In sutta 15 we see how everything arises in interdependence with everything else, all chains of cause and effect creating infinitely differentiated and differentiating chains or cycles, all interacting with each other in endlessly recurring, varying, and complex patterns. This is called interdependent origination, which is usually identified with a model consisting of twelve *nidanas,* in which the Buddha

progressively identifies the underlying causes of angst—old age, sickness, and death— ending (and therefore beginning, ontologically) with ignorance. Interdependent origination is the process. Similarly, the Buddha applies the same method to identify a sequence that leads from social violence to craving, its root cause. This is the basis of the Buddha's process theory of existence, in which infinitely intervolved series of causes and effects underlie the structure of samsara, which he compares to a hairball.

Sakra asks the Buddha to explain the fetters that bind beings to dysfunctional relationships, so the Buddha traces the sequence of cause and effect from hatred, harmfulness, hostility, and malignancy to jealousy and avarice, to feeling (like and dislike), desire, thinking, and finally to the principle of *papanca,* its ultimate cause.

PROLIFERATION

The first cause of interdependent origination, which ends with the fetters by which beings are bound, is Pali *papanca,* which Walshe translates as the "tendency to proliferation." Thus, as a result of the tendency to proliferation, thinking arises (cf. Padmasambhava's "thinking's thinking" [Tib. *sems-nyid*),[252] which leads in turn to desire, like and dislike (we might say, feeling), jealousy and avarice, the latter the immediate cause of the bondage to living in a state of hatred—clearly referring to the political state of fifth century BCE India, which was not so different from our own time. The Pali word means 'expansion,' 'diffuseness,' 'manifoldness,' possibly related to Sanskrit *prapanca,* 'expansion of the universe' (cosmic inflation). The final term in any such series is, by definition, ontological. The 'tendency to proliferation' must be the original and innate *sankhara.* It also means 'obstacle,' 'impediment,' 'a burden which causes 'hindrance,' 'delay'; 'illusion,' 'obsession,' 'hindrance to spiritual progress'; 'diffuseness,' 'copiousness,' the last two words

[252] "When the mind thinks about something, desire arises; when the mind thinks about nothing, desire does not arise." (D 21.2.2)

relating to the etymology just given. However, Rhys Davids suggests that the more likely etymology is *pada,* 'obstacle' (for the feet). In any case, the word refers to the innate intentionality of reality/sentience itself, which inherently posits proliferation/differentiation. This is the ultimate condition on which all the constructions arise and the appearances that create the pseudo-world of samsara and the desirous attachment thereto that obstructs spiritual progress, the quantum froth of reality.

PRACTICE

The next three are really one question because they all have the same answer: what practice leads to the elimination of the tendency to differentiation, self-restraint, and controlling, not of the senses, but the sense-faculties. The Buddha's answer is that the cultivation of *wholesome* habits of mind and physical conduct is the practice that leads to both of these, raising the question of what constitutes wholesomeness.[253] In the context of the sense-faculties of the eye,

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[253] The word translated as 'wholesome' both here and in Nanamoli and Bodhi's translation of the Majjhima Nikaya is *kusala.* Access to Insight translates it as 'skilful mental qualities.' PED has 'clever,' 'skilful,' 'expert'; 'good,' 'right,' 'meritorious.' Sanskrit has 'proper,' 'fit for,' 'good,' 'suitable,' 'skilful,' 'competent,' 'healthy,' 'well,' 'able,' 'adroit,' 'in good condition,' 'clever,' 'right,' 'prosperous,' 'conversant with,' 'religious merit', 'ability', 'well-being,' 'virtue,' 'benevolence,' 'happily,' 'cheerfully,' 'happiness,' 'cleverness,' 'prosperous condition,' 'welfare,' 'competence,' 'in a good manner,' 'properly,' 'well.' Ironically, the literal meaning of wholesome is 'of benefit to the soul.' The Pali has nothing of the vague moralistic connotations of the English, however, but rather speaks directly to the Law of Karma as the essential functional principle of Buddhist ethics. Thus, when the Buddha says that the practice that leads to the cessation of the principle of proliferation is the pursuit of happiness based on the *kusalas,* he is distinguishing between karmically beneficial and karmically non-beneficial pleasures. This is essentially identical with Buckminster Fuller's theory of morality as a self-correcting process of adjustment or adaptation to circumstances, in which one polarity leads to maximum functionality and the other to maximum dysfunctionality. The Law of Karma says that one experiences the same *quality* that inheres in one's intention. Therefore, if one wants to experience the quality of enlightenment, one should *intend* (lit. 'direct

the ear, the nose, the mouth, the skin, and the brain, the Buddha recognizes that sensations do not merely "flow into" the mind through the senses, but the senses also "flow out" to the constructions through the senses. *In other words, the senses construct their own reality.* This is the literal meaning of the Pali word usually translated as 'taint' or 'corruption,' *asava (*lit. 'that which flows,' 'a discharge from a sore'). 'Taint' or 'corruption' unnecessarily hypostatizes this word, which really refers to the quality of dynamic reciprocity that underlies sensory perception. Reception and perception are reciprocals of this dynamic process, which is unified in the *asava,* which may also be translated as 'mental bias' or 'attention.'

THE ASCETICS AND THE BRAHMANS

Sakra also wants to know whether the ascetics and the Brahmans all teach and practise the same thing, and whether they are all equally adept in their teaching. In other suttas, the Buddha says that he has rediscovered a forgotten primordial teaching. Here the Buddha tells Sakra that the world is made up of many elemental patterns to which beings can become addicted, declaring that their pattern alone is true and everything else is false. This is attachment to belief, which the Buddha warns against, thus warning us against sectarianism too. With respect to attainment, the Buddha declares that only those who have perfected the destruction of craving or desirous attachment, in other words, those who are perfectly dispassionate, are truly emancipated. Thus, his implication is that other teachers have different paths that lead to different goals and, thus, are not emancipated (e.g., Mahavira, the leader of the Jains). The goal of final and complete emancipation, arhantship, requires dispassion as its essential requisite.

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one's attention to') the state of an enlightened being. Conduct based on such an intention is *kusala.*

Sakra echoes the Buddha: "Passion, sir, is a disease, a boil, a dart. It seduces a man, drawing him into this or that state of becoming, so that he is reborn in high states or low."[254]

Sakra tells the Buddha that he asked these same questions of the other teachers, and so impressed were they that they immediately converted to his point of view.

The passage that follows is hard to follow but fascinating. The Buddha asks Sakra if he has ever experienced joy and happiness such as he is experiencing now. Sakra admits that he has just once before, when he was victorious in the war of the devas against the anti-gods. To recap briefly, the devas cast the anti-gods out of the realm of the Thirty-Three, demonizing the asuras, who appear to have been powerful primordial cosmic and telluric spirits, older and stronger than the devas, who were cast down into the one world ocean where they continue to struggle against the devas, including fomenting discord in the human world. Curiously, *even the anti-gods, however, come to honour the Buddha in this sutta.* Sakra refers to *oja*, translated by Walshe as 'the food of the gods,' implying that the reason for the war was the desire of the devas to have the anti-gods' share of this sacred substance. Thus, Sakra's answer to the Buddha may be referring specifically to the *oja*. In other words, the joy and happiness of consuming *oja* is equal to the joy and happiness of a stream entrant. The two things are equated!

Oja does not appear in the PED, but in Tamilcube's Pali English Dictionary it means 'essence,' 'juice,' 'sap,' as well as 'strength,' 'sap of life,' 'vitality.' Walshe compares *oja* to a special divine essence of deva origin and the wondrous food served to the bodhisattvas by Vimalakirti, a wealthy patron of the Buddha that is regarded as the model of the ideal lay follower. This term seems to be a synonym for soma, the mind-altering drink of the devas. The anti-gods are drunk when they are expelled from the realm of the Thirty-Three. Drinking soma is the prerogative of the gods. Thus, it seems likely

[254] D 21.2.7.

that the war in heaven was a war over soma: "Whatever is now the food of the gods, and what the food of the asuras is, henceforth we shall enjoy both."[255] Consuming soma and entering the stream of the path are equated. The sutta says that the dharma is the realization of the highest inspiration and truth, equivalent to that of the rishis. Nevertheless, Sakra declares that the happiness of the dharma is greater even than the happiness that he felt then, because of the passionate character of the former, so that they both are and are not the same. The dharma both incorporates and transcends the original Vedic sacrament. Interestingly, the soma continues to be produced by the churning of the one world ocean (*samudra manthan*) by both the devas *and the anti-gods*. The anti-gods participate in the production of soma!

As a result of entering the stream, Sakra will be reborn as a person, which is a desirable rebirth for a deva; his human rebirth will be intentional, i.e., he will choose the circumstances of his future human rebirth; if he achieves enlightenment he will live as an enlightened being;[256] if he does not achieve enlightenment, he will be reborn as a deva on the highest plane, i.e., the abode of the Peerless devas, where the arhants are reborn prior to attaining nirvana; the Peerless devas are "more glorious than the devas."

In the summary poem, we encounter the familiar "dart of craving" motif that is a major symbolic motif of Buddhism. The Buddha is praised as 'mighty hero, kinsman of the sun' (*adiccabandhu*), referring to the lineage of the Shakyans, the Buddha's clan. The *Mahavamsa* gives the whole genealogy of the Shakyans, tracing them back to King Okkaka (Skt. *Iksavaku*), whose ancestral kingdom, interestingly, was Kosala. King Okkaka himself was a descendant of Maha Sammata, the first world ruler and the founder of the Shakya

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[255] D 21.2.7.

[256] "As one-who-knows I'll dwell, and there await my end" (*annata viharissami, sveva anto bhavissati*). Literally 'living as one who knows, tomorrow the goal must be.' "End" here does not imply annihilation, but rather the 'end,' 'goal,' 'limit,' 'the other side,' i.e., transcendence. *Bhavissati* is the future tense of *bhavi,* 'to become.'

dynasty. Maha Sammata himself was a descendant of the Solar Dynasty (*Suryavansha*). The Solar Dynasty is one of four ruling houses of the kshatriya caste, which includes a Lunar Dynasty.

The poem refers to worshipping the Buddha, not as a god, but rather revering him as a "peerless Lord." Here we find the epithet, Shakyamuni, meaning 'Shakyan sage,' referring to his clan name. Rare in the Pali Canon, it became popular in the Mahayana literature.

Sakra makes Pancasikha the king of the *gandhabbas* and gives Bhadda Suriyavaccasa to him as his wife out of gratitude for giving him access to the Buddha.

Sakra touches the earth with his hand—the same gesture that the Buddha used at his Enlightenment—and recites what is to all intents and purposes a mantra, three times, in a kind of act of power: "Homage to the Blessed One, the arahant, the supremely Enlightened Buddha" (*namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma–sambuddhassa*).[257] This mantra is chanted in Pali today in sets of three.

At that moment, the Dharma Eye arises in Sakra and he becomes a stream entrant, realizing that everything is transient, along with eight thousand devas.

[257] D 21.2.10.

The Great Establishing of Presence

Digha Nikaya 22

Country: Kuru
Locale: Kammasadhamma
Speaker: the Buddha

This sutta is widely regarded as one of the most important suttas in the Pali Canon, if not *the* most important. It appears again in nearly identical language in the Majjhima Nikaya as the Satipatthana Sutta.[258] The title includes the central concept of the sutta, *satipatthana.* PED defines *satipatthana* as 'intent contemplation and mindfulness,' 'earnest thought,' 'application of mindfulness.'

Mahasatipatthana breaks down into *maha* + *sati* + *patthana*:

MAHA: Great.
SATI: Memory, awareness; recollection; active state of mind, fixing the mind strongly on any subject, attention, attentiveness, thought, reflection, consciousness.
SATI is the most important word here.
PAṬṬHĀNA: Setting forth; putting forward; a starting point.
PATTHANA: Aiming at; aspiration; desire.
The Sanskrit equivalent is *smrtyu* + *pasthana*:

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[258] M 10.

SMRTYU: Memory, awareness, remembering, remembrance, reminiscence, thinking of or upon memory, calling to mind, awareness.
PASTHANA: Leading or guiding cattle, formed, modelled, wrought.

The sutta is clearly a system of *practice,* thus a *manual* for cultivating awareness that aims at or aspires to the starting point or goal by means of the practice of attention or attentiveness. The word "attention" can also be readily pluralized (i.e., the Four Attentions). This sutta has the appearance of an early comprehensive guide to meditation for practitioners, including theory and practice that works through a series of graded insights that cultivates the dual practice of meditation and wisdom in order to achieve final emancipation.

The Buddha is staying in a market town of the Kurus called Kammasasdhamma. This is the same place as in Mahanidana Sutta, the Great Discourse on Origination.[259] It is significant that two major doctrines of the *Buddhadharma*, interdependent origination and awareness, were taught here. Bhikku Nanamoli remarks that Kammasadhamma may have been near modern Delhi.[260]

Unlike most other suttas, the Buddha is not represented as conversing with a visitor, but rather delivering a sermon directly to the monastics. The sutta simply records his sermon. No other sutta in the Digha Nikaya is like this, except for sutta 26, which presents the Buddha's famous advice to the monastics to be islands and refuges unto themselves with no refuge other than the dharma, affirming that the path to emancipation, like emancipation itself, is *individual.* Interestingly, the Buddha says in sutta 26 that the way to do this is by cultivating the Four Foundations of Awareness.

The Buddha declares the *ekayano maggo* that leads to the purification of beings from angst, the woe of existence. This was the

[259] D 15.
[260] Nanamoli, *Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha,* p. 1188, n. 134.

Buddha's original purpose when he abandoned the life of the world at the age of 29. This phrase is a compound of *eka* + *yano* + *maggo*:

EKA: Same; certain; unknown (used for the indefinite article). One.
YANA (YANO): Carriage, vehicle, going.
MAGGO: Trace, track; road, path, course, passage.

This fascinating phrase has been variously translated as 'this one way,' 'the only way,' 'the one and only way,' 'one going,' and 'a path that goes one way only.' (cf. 'direct path,' 'right path').[261] This 'singular way' consists of 'the Four Foundations of Awareness.' The Pali word is *satipatthana,* which we discussed above. The word 'foundation' lacks the directed aspect of the Pali that surely characterizes the 'certain going'—setting forth, putting forward, starting point. Thus, I refer to the Four Attentions or 'consciousness vectors.' These consist of directing attention to the body, the feelings, the mind, and mind-objects.

Body, feelings, mind, and mind-objects seem to be associated purposely, in a kind of sequence that leads from the most "outward" level of experience, including our intuition of "embodiment," to feelings, sentient mind itself, and finally the mental corollary and polarity of "body"—mind-objects, referring to such things as numbers, logic, the Jungian archetypes, synchronicities, etc., definitively "real" but intrinsically non-physical (Jung's "psychoid"). Although they may influence the physical, Jung called these four qualities the four functions and the totality they embody, the psyche. Body is sensation; feelings are feelings of pleasure, pain, and moral and aesthetic judgments; mind is thinking; and mind-objects are intuitions, immediate mental apprehensions that, like sensation, are simply "given."

[261] Cf. *ekayana,* the universal vehicle, the central principle of the Lotus Sutra.

There is also a somewhat forced correlation of the Four Attentions with the Five Aggregates of form, feeling, consciousness, perception, and mental formations, so-called.

The sutta is a meditation manual. One might even liken it to a *ngondro*. It lists and describes no less than twenty-one different specific meditations, organized according to the Four Attentions — body, feelings, mind, and mind-objects—in what seems to represent an intentional progression toward a goal. The core message of the sutta, however, appears in a recurring "insight," as Walshe, Nanamoli, and Bodhi all call it, which is repeated at the end of each meditation as a kind of refrain:

> [1] So he abides contemplating body as body **internally,** contemplating body as body **externally,** contemplating body as body **both internally and externally.** [2] He abides contemplating **arising** phenomena, abides contemplating **vanishing** phenomena in the body, he abides contemplating **both arising and vanishing phenomena in the body.** [3] Or else, **mindfulness** that 'there is body' is present to him just to the extent necessary for knowledge and awareness. And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. And that, monks, is how a monk abides contemplating body as body. (emphases added)

This text is repeated nine times in the sutta, thus dividing the practices up into the divisions that follow:

1. Breathing;
2. Four Postures, Clear Awareness, Reflection on the Body, Four Elements, Nine Charnel Ground Contemplations;
3. Feelings;
4. Mind;
5. Five Hindrances;
6. Five Aggregates;
7. Six Sense Bases;
8. Seven Factors of Enlightenment; and
9. Four Noble Truths.

1 and 2 pertain to the body, 3 to feelings, 4 to mind, and 5 through 9 refer to mind-objects. As one can see from the description, the starting point is the grossest level—the body—of what is immediately apprehensible —the internal. Making this the basis of meditation is an innovation of the *Buddhadharma,* as pointed out by Buddhaghosa. As one becomes established in one's meditation at each level, one progresses from the internal to the external, thence to both internal and external, in a sort of dialectic by which one realizes the underlying unity in duality. In the second exercise one converts the intuition of embodiment to the processes that constitute its content, contemplating phenomena as processes in their appearance and disappearance, and finally in both as complementary poles of a single process. Finally, one realizes the same meditation as the direct apprehension of body without any additional thought or consideration, i.e., without content. In this state, one experiences dispassion.

The same methodology is applied to the body, feelings, mind, and mind-objects through a series of twenty-one practices. This is an example of the graduated path, by which one cultivates the qualities of enlightenment in an elementary progression in the same way in which one might build a house, starting with the foundation.

The final exercise in this path is the Fourth Meditative attainment, which is a state of mindful equanimity characterized by indifference toward feelings of pleasure/pain, gladness/sadness, and all similar emotional dichotomies. This state is identified with dispassion and associated with emancipation itself.

Thus, this sequence of tasks lays bare the whole structure of the Buddhist path as understood by the anonymous redactors of the Mahasatipatthana Sutta.

PRACTICE

1. **Awareness of the Breathing**. The first group of practices is called **contemplation of the body,** and the first exercise in this group is called *awareness of breathing*. This exercise is frequently mentioned in the Pali Canon and has a big reputation. The Buddha

referred to it as "the Tathagata's dwelling,"[262] and practised it himself, even after his enlightenment experience. The Buddha said that the practice of awareness of the breathing can carry the aspirant all the way to emancipation,[263] which raises the question of why the Buddha taught "eighty-four" thousand meditative techniques, including the twenty-one highlighted in this sutta. The stock answer is that different techniques are suited to different people, based on their personal needs and where they are on the path, i.e., their karma. For example, not all techniques lead to the highest goal; metta meditation only leads to rebirth in the Brahma realm.[264] However, the fact that one technique alone is sufficient for enlightenment qualifies our understanding of the gradual path, which includes the notion that a sequence of yogas must be mastered before advanced practice can even begin (e.g., the Tibetan approach). While such a hierarchical structure may have value for some people, it is going too far to say that it is mandatory. At best, one might say that progressive practices are valuable and effective for some people. Others may (and do) pursue a single essential practice with equal efficacy. Both gradual and instantaneous enlightenment are implied in the Pali Canon.

The first step in the first practice is to enter into a state of seclusion, whether in the forest, at the foot of a tree, or in an empty place. Second, one sits cross-legged, in the archetypal yoga posture. One holds the body erect, and "establishes mindfulness before him."[265] Walshe suggests that this means focusing the attention on the breath, long associated with the vital principle, energy, and creativity in many primordial traditions (e.g., Skt. *prana*). Thus, "mindfully

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[262] "It is a noble dwelling, a divine dwelling, the Tathagata's dwelling" (S 54.11).

[263] Kimbila Sutta (S 54.10). See also Nirmalananda Giri, "The Buddhist Tradition of Breath Meditation."

[264] This is the conventional view. Richard Gombrich argues that metta meditation is one way to the realization of nirvana in *How Buddhism Began,* p. 62 et seq. See also "Kindness and Compassion as Means to Nirvana in Early Buddhism."

[265] D 22.22.2.

he breathes in, mindfully he breathes out."[266] Without restraining or interfering with the breathing in any way, he observes the length of the breaths as he breathes in and out, whether long or short. To this awareness, he adds awareness of the whole body, calming the whole bodily process. This is the practice of awareness of the breathing.

2. **The Four Postures.** The second exercise applies the principle of awareness of the body to the activities of walking, standing, sitting, and lying down. This may be the origin of the famous *walking meditation.*

3. **Clear Awareness.** The third exercise, *Clear Awareness,* extends this principle of awareness to the ordinary activities of daily living. *Clear awareness* seems to be a development of the Four Postures, both in terms of range of activities and intensity. For example, Walshe uses the word 'know' in the Four Postures, whereas in Clear Awareness he uses the phrase 'clearly aware of what he is doing' (*sampajanakari hoti*).

4. **Reflection on the Parts of the Body.** The *reflection on the parts of the body* consists of an incisive and exacting self-analysis. In other suttas, the cultivation of revulsion toward the body is recommended. However, it may be argued that revulsion or repulsion is simply another form of attachment (passionate dislike as distinct from dispassion), in which case this exercise would have to be regarded as compensatory and intermediate, rather than cultivating a final goal or state.

5. **The Four Elements.** This exercise continues the foregoing by analyzing the body in terms of its elemental states—extension, cohesion, temperature, motion (distension), corresponding to earth, water, fire, and air. A more intuitive interpretation might be to regard the body as consisting of solids, liquids, heat, and gas (breath).

6. **The Nine Charnel Ground Contemplations.** Finally, in the context of the contemplations of the body, the nine charnel ground contemplations refer to the contemplation of corpses in progressive

[266] Ibid.

states of decay, ranging from a few days to the bones rotted away to powder, and all the intermediate states of decay one can imagine. In contemplating the corpses in these states, one reflects on and realizes the fact that there is no essential difference between one's own body and fate and the bodies and fates that one observes. The presumed goal of this practice is the development of revulsion toward the body, culminating in dispassion. Hard to practise in the West, this potentially powerful practice is suggestive of similar tantric meditations. For example, Padmasambhava is said to have meditated in charnel grounds for a total of twelve years.

7. **Contemplation of Feelings.** The second contemplation is directed toward the feelings, in the exact Jungian sense of "sensations" of pleasure, pain, or neutral sensations. Here the Buddha simply identifies continuously a feeling as pleasurable, painful, or neutral and as sensual or non-sensual, without involvement.

8. **Contemplation of Mind.** This practice is very similar to the previous one on feelings, except that here one cultivates awareness of mental states, including lust, hatred (including therefore what we would call emotions apparently), delusion, contraction, distraction, developed, surpassed, concentrated, and liberated or their opposites. This sequence of states seems to be progressive.

9. **Contemplation of Mind-Objects.** Buddhism considers the mind to be a sense, exactly as the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body are. Each sense has its correlative objects, which are all equally real (in the conventional sense). Accepting that the mind is a sixth sense, rather than merely an epiphenomenon of the other five, the mind must also have its correlative objects, which are as real as what we call matter. These are the *dhammas,* phenomena as they are in themselves.

Thus, each sense is threefold, consisting of the internal or subjective aspect (which is merely a thought and has no more reality than a mirage), the external or objective aspect (the object itself, as we would say), and the phenomenological moment that joins the two like glue and constitutes "actual" experience.

The Buddha prescribes five exercises for contemplation of mind-objects: the Five Hindrances, the Five Aggregates, the six internal

and the six external Sense Bases, the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, and the Four Noble Truths. All these refer to psychic facts or laws that constitute the metaphysical fabric of experience and are the primary objects of dharma, just as physical laws, the laws of nature, so-called, constitute the experiential fabric of metaphysics and are the primary object of science.

Practising **awareness of the hindrances** educates one to ignore the emotions of sensual desire, anger, sloth-torpor, restlessness-worry, and doubt that impede emancipation. Ignored, they disappear, because they are created by the mind. The meditator cultivates awareness of each hindrance, e.g., sensual desire. One discerns whether or not it is present in oneself, its arising and vanishing, and how to abandon attachment to the hindrance that in turn results in its ceasing to come about in the future. In other words, one consciously and intentionally interrupts the flow of the karmic causal sequence.

The **practice of the Five Aggregates** similarly cultivates awareness of the arising and vanishing of craving, or desirous attachment. These are forms, feelings, perceptions, formations (*sankharakhandha*), and consciousness. The mental formations are the factors that underlie karma, including volition (*cetana*) or intention.

The **practice of the six internal and external Sense Bases** is simply the cultivation of awareness of this structure, especially the significance of the phenomenological moment in which subjectivity and objectivity are joined. The text refers to ten fetters that arise in connection with this "conjunction": sensuality, resentment, pride, wrong views, doubt, desire for becoming, attachment to rites and rituals, jealousy, avarice, and ignorance. *Ditthi,* 'wrong views' can also mean 'dogmas.' Having identified each fetter as it arises in the moment between subjectivity and objectivity, one abandons it.

Abandoning the fetters of the senses, the aggregates of grasping, and the five hindrances, the practitioner learns to identify and cultivate the **Seven Factors of Enlightenment** through self-observation. Thus, he observes the presence, absence, arising, and development of awareness, investigation of states, energy, delight, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity. 'Energy' is

Pali *viriya,* literally 'manliness,' same root as 'virile' and 'virtue.' The oldest known representation of the cross-legged posture by what seems to be a shaman or yogi also exhibits an erection! Similarly, the word 'jhana' can be translated as 'ecstasy.' The first three jhanas are states of delight, pleasure, or happiness. Nirvana itself is an ecstatic state. *Viriya* also refers to Right Effort, the sixth limb of the Noble Eightfold Path and the first of the final three limbs that designate the end of the path.

Finally, the exercises of the Mahasatipatthana Sutta conclude with the application of the **Four Noble Truths** to experience: "this is suffering," "this is the cause of suffering," "this is the cessation of suffering," and "this is the cause of the cessation of suffering." The Buddha describes various kinds of suffering, including birth, ageing, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, sadness, distress, being attached to the unloved, being separated from the loved, and not getting what one wants.

Given so much suffering, it is not surprising that one might not wish to be born ever again but the text informs us, "this cannot be gained by wishing."[267]

Craving can only be extinguished by dispassion, not by desire directed to existence *or non-existence. This text refutes the common but mistaken notion that the Buddha advocates the pursuit of non-being.*

Escape becomes possible through the realization of the universal fact of transience, consciousness of which is cultivated by the foregoing practices on awareness of the arising and non-arising of phenomena. Since everything is transitory, the experience of *samsaric* bondage itself must be inherently transitory.

THE ORIGIN OF CRAVING

The Buddha identifies how the craving that leads to rebirth arises and establishes itself wherever there is anything agreeable and

[267] D 22.18.

pleasurable, including the senses, sensory consciousness, sensory contact, feeling, perception, volition, craving itself, thinking, and pondering. Including craving in the list of the causes of craving indicates a profound awareness of what today we would call a "feedback loop." The peculiar intensification of craving is due to the way in which craving takes itself as its own object, thereby "fuelling" itself.

The cessation of angst arises in the abandonment (*not repression, note*) of craving, resulting in dispassion. The Buddha reviews the list of places where craving establishes itself, this time in relation to cessation, the opposite of craving.

THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH

The Noble Truth of the Way of Practice Leading to the Cessation of Suffering is the Noble Eightfold Path. In this sutta, Right View is equated with the Four Noble Truths just discussed. Right Thought is equated with renunciation. Right Speech is equated with the Fourth Precept of Pansil. Right Action summarizes the first three precepts, whereas once again we see that the Fifth Precept, prohibiting alcohol, is absent here as it frequently is in the Pali Canon. The inclusion of Right Livelihood in the Noble Eightfold Path is very interesting, since monastics are forbidden from carrying on a livelihood because of receiving alms. *The only possible interpretation of this fact is that the path is accessible to householders,* whereas the livelihood of the monastic may be regarded as non-livelihood. Since the Buddha says that nirvana is only present where the Noble Eightfold Path is present, and vice versa, this is an extraordinarily significant fact. Some might argue that the three stages of meditative practice are above livelihood, and therefore restricted to monastics, but the fact of householders attaining emancipation in the Pali Canon argues against this, as does the Buddha's preaching against the "closed fist." However, the evidence of the stories of the Pali Canon themselves, taken as a whole, without necessarily implying that any of the stories is historically factual, is that householders are very involved with the sangha and are able to aspire in their own

right and even attain emancipation, at which point they would conventionally enter the monastic sangha. Therefore, we must get past the notion, prevalent among some religious Buddhists, which assigns a secondary or inferior status to the householders, and an exaggerated status to the monastics, most of whom were and are still *puthujjana* monastics, especially in these latter days of the pseudo-sangha.[268] There are also Buddhist schools that do not look down on lay people. This view of householders may be compared to the view of women, another group that is virtually excluded by certain Buddhist groups but not by the Buddha himself.

Right Effort is *vayama* in Pali, the mental factor behind which is *viriya,* the third of the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, generally translated as 'energy.' Right Effort refers to striving and will. Right Awareness is identified with the Four Attentions that we have discussed—body, feeling, mind, and mind-objects. Finally, Right Concentration is identified with the Four Meditative attainments, the process of the progressive refinement of consciousness. The First Meditative attainment is produced by the cultivation of **dispassion.** The Second Meditative attainment is produced by the cultivation of **concentration.** The Third Meditative attainment comes about because of the **fading away of delight.** The Fourth Meditative attainment is brought about by the **abandonment of pleasure and pain,** the two characteristics of feeling. Thus, by abandoning feeling, one attains Right Concentration and the Cessation of Suffering.

Here we see the incredible cohesion of early Buddhist thinking. The dharma is not merely a haphazard collection of lists. Rather, it is a profoundly coherent philosophy that implies an original philosopher, the Buddha, which was then carried forward by his successors, much as Plato carried forward the ideas of Socrates.

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[268] The Buddha says that the sangha will not last longer than 500 years, i.e., 100 CE. In fact, it did not last even 120 years. Since a sangha divided is no sangha at all, in fact there is no sangha today and has not been for 2,300 years.

SEVEN DAYS TO EMANCIPATION

In conclusion, the Buddha explores the relationship between meditation, emancipation, and time (*samsara*), and declares that if one practises the exercises of the Mahasatipatthana Sutta for seven years, one will definitely attain either the state of an arhant or the state of a non-returner. Here we see very clearly that the sutta is a kind of manual for monastics and meditators. The arhant attains final release from the process of rebirth, i.e., time itself, and the non-temporal, trans-dual, immortal deathless state to which the Buddha frequently alludes. The Buddha himself is the highest type of arhant, thus introducing the concept of "types of arhant," just as there are types of buddhas. The non-returner is never again reborn as a person, but is born in the Five Pure Abodes, the five highest planes of the Form world from which they will attain arhantship in the future, after they completely purify themselves.

However, it would be a mistake to read the reference to "seven years" as the time *required to complete* the twenty-one meditations of the Mahasatipatthana Sutta, which works out to four months per practice. It is, rather, the *maximum* time, for "whoever should practise these four foundations of mindfulness for just one week may expect one of two results: either Arahantship in this life or, if there should be some substrate left, the state of a Non-returner."[269] *This statement parallels other suttas in which the Buddha says that one week of practice is sufficient to attain emancipation.* What does this mean?

Note the threefold repetition of the sacred number 7: seven years, seven months, seven days. Interestingly, the sum of three sevens is twenty-one, the number of exercises described in the Mahasatipatthana Sutta. The number appears in the sutta as the number of the Factors of Enlightenment. In the Cabalistic tradition, 777 is the number of salvation. The significance of the number 7 is widespread in Buddhism. For example, 7 × 7 is 49, the number of days

[269] D 22.22.

one remains in the *bardo* (Tib. 'in between'; cf. Pali *antara*) before being reborn.[270]

The literal meaning of this passage, then, is that *by the practice of the Four Foundations of Awareness, elaborated in the twenty-one practices of the Mahasatipatthana Sutta, one will achieve either the state of a non-returner or arhantship in seven days to seven years of practice, depending on the amount of "substrate left."*

The first thing we note about this passage is the minimum time in relation to the number of exercises. The nine charnel ground meditations alone cannot be completed in less than a year. Therefore, the twenty-one practices must be regarded as adjuvants or aids to the essential practice, the cultivation of the Four Attentions themselves. However, underlying the cultivation of the Four Attentions is the practice of awareness itself. Presumably, this is the essential practice to which the Buddha refers when he says that practising the Four Foundations of Awareness can lead to arhantship or the state of a non-returner in as short a time as seven days, which is implicit in all the practices yet identical with none of them. In the beginning, the Buddha alludes to the "one way" (*ekayana*). I propose then that this phrase has a double meaning: i.e., the singular or essential practice or technique that includes all other practices and techniques is, therefore, the key to the nature of practice itself, which is "oneness"—self-unification, self-integration, concentration, "one-pointedness," "at-one-ment," etc. The practices in this manual of meditation combine the essential technique of attentiveness with the cultivation of wisdom, especially the realization of the nature of the body, feelings, mind, the Hindrances, the Aggregates, the senses, enlightenment, the Four Noble Truths, and awareness itself, in a progression that culminates in emancipation.

The period of one week also seems very short until we consider two facts: first, the qualification that one may achieve *either* the state of an arhant *or* the state of a non-returner, thus enlarging the field significantly, and, second, the reference to a "substrate."

[270] See Bodhi, *In the Buddha's Words,* p. 454, n.33.

Nanamoli and Bodhi's translation of the Majjhima Nikaya version of this sutta use the phrase "trace of clinging." The Pali word is *upadi.* The dictionary meaning of this word is 'fuel of life.' PED has 'stuff of life,' 'substratum of being,' '*khandha'* (the *khandhas* are the five sensorial aggregates—forms, sensations, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness, which together constitute the basis of craving).

The implication is that the 'fuel of life' is exhausted by meditation on awareness, in which renunciation and the absence of arising of any new craving *causes the existing fire of karma to burn itself out.* Padmasambhava uses the metaphor of the master being consumed in the ecstasy of their attainment, leaving only a residue of ash that is blown away by the winds of prana.[271]

This implies in turn that the state of awareness is not the same as complete emancipation, but that one who accomplishes awareness must attain final emancipation within seven rebirths. *Awareness* appears as a discrete attainment in itself. Otherwise, it makes no sense to refer to a period of time during which a substrate is "left." Meditation "burns" karma, but how long it takes depends on how much karmic residue is left and how intense the meditation is (thus, in this analogy meditation itself is the *va* or 'air' that alternatively fans and blows out the fire of craving in nirvana). As Rhys Davids admits in the PED, this is the ancient Vedic meaning of nirvana. The attainment of awareness might simply be awareness itself, so that the path and the fruit are the same. In this case, seven days is indeed a short time but would presumably only apply to near-arhants. An arhant is by definition a person who is already well advanced in the practice of awareness. Sahampati refers to them when he implores the Buddha to teach for the sake of those whose eyes are covered with only a thin coating of "dust."[272]

Thus, the suttas refer to nirvana and *parinibbana,* only the latter constituting complete and final emancipation. In Gotama's case,

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[271] Guenther, *Teachings of Padmasambhava,* pp. 54, 58, 63f.
[272] M 26.20f.

the substrate contains enough karmic "fuel" to sustain his life for another forty-five years. For others this period may be extended to seven rebirths. For a bodhisattva it may extend indefinitely. However, no one can attain it in less than a week, which is the period that the Buddha remains in nirvanic ecstasy continuously after his enlightenment.

The Buddha concludes, "There is, monks, this *one way* to the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and distress, for the disappearance of pain and sadness, for the gaining of the right path, for the realization of Nibbana—that is to say the four foundations of awareness, and it is for this reason that it was said"[273] (italics added).

[273] D 22.22.

Discourse with Payasi

Digha Nikaya 23

Country: Kosala
Locale: Simsapa Forest, Setavya
Speakers: Payasi, Kumara-Kassapa

This sutta is one of only two suttas in the Digha Nikaya where the Buddha is not present. The other is the Subha Sutta,[274] in which Subha asks Ananda to summarize the things that the recently deceased Buddha praised. The Payasi Sutta records a sermon given by Kumara-Kassapa ('Young Kassapa'), not to be confused with Mahakassapa, who would convene the First Buddhist Council. The Venerable Kassapa is the best preacher in the Buddhist sangha. That a sutta uttered completely independently of the Buddha is deemed canonical provides an important insight into the question of what constitutes the *Buddhavacana,* a question addressed in other suttas also. Clearly, the *Buddhavacana* is not limited to the words of the historical Buddha. *Therefore, the utterances of third parties can constitute an authentic, canonical dharma tradition.* Thus, the view that only the words of the historical Buddha constitute the *Buddhavacana,* and historicism itself, is a non-dharmic innovation, impossible in principle and misleading at best.

The sutta makes extensive use of parables. Jesus would popularize the use of spiritual parables, many of which are similar to the Buddhist parables. Here I focus more on the intellectual content of

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[274] D 10.

the sutta rather than on the stories, which are obvious. However, I will include some references to the stories.

Travelling through Kosala with many monastics, Kassapa came to be staying in the *simsapa* forest, north of a town called Setavya, described as a wealthy agricultural town given by King Pasenadi of Kosala to Prince Payasi. The prince is a napper, and when he naps during the afternoon on the roof of his palace, hunchbacks, dwarfs, young girls, and maidens attend him—an interesting glimpse of the life of a governor of a town in northeast India in the fifth century BCE.

In sutta 12, the main character, also the governor of a town, develops the "evil opinion" that unfettered selfishness is the highest good and that altruism should be abandoned (clearly, an early incarnation of Ayn Rand!). Now in this sutta we have Prince Payasi developing the evil opinion that there are no other worlds, no devas, and no karmic consequences. In the northeast Indian civilization of the fifth century of the common era dissident views, skepticism, and even materialism were flourishing, somewhat contrary to our conventional notion of ancient India. Walshe notes that these views were similar to those of Ajita Kesakambali.

The people of Setavya of all classes go out the north gate to visit Kassapa because of his reputation as a great teacher. The prince hears of this, and tells the people to wait for him to join them, apparently with the intention of refuting the view that there are other worlds, devas, and karma. He describes the people of Setavya as foolish and inexperienced. Therefore, Prince Payasi and the people of Setavya go together to see Kassapa.

The prince tells Kassapa that there are no other worlds, no devas, and no karma. Kassapa opines that he has never heard such a view before—an unlikely assertion—so he asks the prince to explain himself.

First, Kassapa asks the prince whether the sun and the moon are in this world or another, and whether they are devas ("spontaneously born") or humans. I have mentioned that *deva* literally means 'shining being.' Tamilcube also has 'sky,' 'rain cloud,' 'celestial being,' so according to this view devas clearly include what we would

call "inanimate" phenomena. Elsewhere the Buddha refers to the sun and moon as devas too.[275] The Prince agrees that the sun and the moon are in another world and that they are devas, not people. Although this is not the only argument that Kassapa makes, it is the first one.

Clearly, this question and the answer imply a way of thinking that is difficult for us to grasp. It also clarifies the early Buddhist conception of devas. Although devas occupy higher worlds than what we inhabit, there is an area of overlap where devas and humans interact. The conception of devas themselves clearly includes the sun and the moon in that category, as the etymology also implies. Therefore, higher worlds may presumably include regions of the universe outside the earth or even the solar system, including other universes, galaxies, stars, solar systems, planets, etc. At the same time, most descriptions of devas in the Pali Canon clearly imply that devas are sentient beings with individuality, somewhat different from our conception of the sun, moon, and stars. If mind or sentience is the underlying reality of everything, then everything is potentially sentient, even natural phenomena, much as in the spiritual conception of the Native Americans.[276]

However, I do not believe that we need to accept the sentience of stars in order to grasp Kassapa's argument. His point is that sun and moon occupy a "higher world"; thus, Payasi is incorrect in his fundamental assertion that there is no other world. In other words, the world is hierarchical and multi-dimensional. Although that would appear to be the immediate implication, the fact that it does not convince the prince suggests that Kassapa is only making an

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[275] Cf. the concept of the *egregore* (Gk. ἐγρήγορος), or watchers, great angel-like spirits a.k.a. 'those that are awake.' These may be interpreted as vast reservoirs or concentrations of psychic energy rather than as conscious entities, though conscious entities may also be *egregores,* as in Haitian Vodou.

[276] Sentience need not imply reflexivity. Many animals are sentient, but self-reflexive only to a limited degree, if at all. Even people are only reflexive to a limited degree, much as we might fancy otherwise. The zenith of consciousness must lie far beyond anything that we can conceive of or imagine.

analogy. Otherwise, it would be absurd for the prince to reject his argument. We look up into the sky and we see that there is a world above and a world below, and that stars populate the world above in the same way, if we see that the world is like this. However, the prince does not agree. Consequently, Kassapa challenges the prince to give reasons for his denial. We see here a kind of formal dialectical structure playing itself out, similar perhaps to the pedagogical dialectics of the Tibetans.

In reply the prince tells Kassapa of an experiment in which he asked friends and family members, both good and bad, to come and tell him whether there are other worlds, devas, and karma, after they die and are reborn in the hell or heaven worlds. When no one appears to him, he infers that there is no such place.

Kassapa's somewhat mischievous reply points out that it might not be physically possible for the deceased to return to the earth from the hell worlds, any more than it would be possible for a thief to delay their execution. Kassapa's reply may imply that he believes that actual wardens guard the hell worlds, or it may merely be a manner of speech. In any case, the obvious answer to the prince's argument is that he cannot know that the conditions of rebirth in those worlds allow for such a return. Thus, the absence of a return may simply mean that it is not possible, not that such worlds do not exist. Materialists make similar arguments today (the same argument is made against the post-mortem survival of the human personality), for example.

With respect to the good people with whom the prince has made this pact, Kassapa suggests that the earth-plane and humans are so repulsive to spiritual beings that no one returns to the earth-plane to fulfil their pledge: "human beings are unclean, evil-smelling, horrible, revolting and generally considered to be so by the devas"[277] (elsewhere, however, it is said that a human birth is desirable to the devas). The prince rejects this argument too.

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[277] D 23.9.

The next argument is similar to the former one, except that it specifies being reborn as a companion of the Thirty-Three Gods specifically. Kassapa makes the fascinating response that this too is impossible because the rate at which time passes for the companions of the Thirty-Three Gods is faster than it is for people, so that even after a very short time in the world of the Thirty-Three the prince himself will die. Kassapa even gives the ratio of time difference. One human century is equivalent to twenty-four hours in the realm of the Thirty-Three. That is a ratio of 1:36,524, the number of days in a century. This means that the companions of the Thirty-Three travel at 0.9999999996252086 of the speed of light. This effect is called the Lorenz contraction. It is very interesting that the crazy idea that the rate at which time passes can vary according to speed would reappear in 1905, 2,300 years after the *parinibbana,* when a 26-year old patent clerk named Albert Einstein proposed the theory of relativity. Time dilation has now been measured and is observed fact. Intense gravity creates a similar effect. The devas are luminous energy beings. Consequently, the faster they move the more slowly time will pass for them in terms of the human frame of reference: hence the longevity of devas referred to in the suttas. Time dilation ("lost time") is also a property of the UFO phenomenon and a characteristic of the hypnotic state as well.

Kassapa points out that being unable to perceive a thing is no proof of its non-existence, any more than being blind proves that light and colour do not exist. This does not prove that they exist either, so Kassapa recurs to his first argument, stating that because there are higher, luminous beings such as the sun and moon, therefore such beings exist.

Furthermore, Kassapa tells the prince that other worlds cannot be seen with the physical eye, but are seen with the "divine" eye, which is possessed by the ascetics and Brahmans of the forest. This eye, when "purified," vastly exceeds the powers of human sight and

includes other worlds and devas. Therefore, it can be experienced.[278]

The prince is incorrigible. He rejects this argument too. However, the prince replies that if the higher worlds are so great, and the ascetics and Brahmans know this, then why do they not all kill themselves? That they do not do so shows that they do not have this knowledge.

However, Kassapa replies that they do not kill themselves because of "hidden dangers," presumably associated with the consequences of karma. He compares killing oneself to a pregnant woman cutting open her belly to discover the gender of her child: "...the lady took a knife and, going into an inner room, cut open her belly, thinking: 'If only I could find out whether it is a boy or a girl.' And thus she destroyed herself and the living embryo,[279] and the

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[278] LSD researchers such as Stanislav Grof and others have proved this statement experientially. It is a peculiarity of dogmatic secularism that any experience that does not fit into the "scientistic" paradigm is automatically dismissed as a hallucination and further research banned by the state! Note that most serious LSD researchers who actually experience psychedelics, like Stanislav Grof, subscribe to a transcendentalist perspective because of their experiences.

[279] The reference to the "living embryo" suggests the *tathagatagarbha* (lit. 'Buddha embyro'), in which case one may regard Kassapa's parable as an allegory of the spiritual consequences of trying to achieve emancipation through suicide. Similarly, the third rule that entails defeat in the Vinaya is killing: "Should any bhikkhu intentionally deprive a human being of life, or search for an assassin for him, or praise the advantages of death, or incite him to die (saying,): 'My good man, what use is this evil, miserable life to you? Death would be better for you than life,' or with such an idea in mind, such a purpose in mind, should in various ways praise the advantages of death or incite him to die, he also is defeated and no longer in affiliation." Killing also violates the First Precept. Therefore, the veneration of "samadhi suicide" by those who establish mummies in their temples as objects of worship, or the practice of self-immolation, are non-dharmic and lead to self-annihilation, if we take Kassapa's advice literally: "you, Prince, will come to ruin and destruction if you foolishly and unwisely seek the other world in the wrong way." According to the Vinaya, anyone who engages in these practices, *or advocates them,* is automatically banned.

wealth as well, just as fools do who seek their inheritance unwisely, heedless of hidden danger."[280]

The implication is that such an act would undermine the attainment being sought. Instead, the ascetics and Brahmans wait for that to ripen which will ripen in its own time, creating ever-greater merit for the welfare of others, out of compassion for the world. The description is nearly that of a bodhisattva:

> Those ascetics and Brahmins who observe morality and are well-conducted do not seek to hasten the ripening of that which is not yet ripe, but rather they wisely await its ripening. Their life is profitable to those ascetics and Brahmins, for the longer such moral and well-conducted ascetics and Brahmins remain alive, the greater the merit that they create, they practise for the welfare of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the profit and benefit of devas and humans. (ibid)

In another sutta, some of the monastics kill themselves while the Buddha is on retreat, an action that the Buddha condemns on his return.[281]

The prince is still not convinced. Kassapa yields to the prince and asks him to present another reason. Payasi's rather gruesome example amounts to his not seeing the soul leave the body at death, even when the deceased dies in a sealed container. The soul should be sealed in the container with the body until it is opened, but when it is opened, nothing is seen. Kassapa's response implies a shared belief that the soul leaves the body during dreaming sleep.[282] Yet, Kassapa points out, no one sees his soul entering or leaving his body at this time, so why would they see anything at death?

The prince, still not convinced, gives another reason for his disbelief. The prince says that a live person is lighter, softer, and more

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[280] D 23.13.

[281] See Analayo, "Mass Suicide of Monks in Discourse and Vinaya Literature."

[282] The sutta also suggests that beheading is being practised as a means of capital punishment.

flexible, whereas a dead person is heavier, stiffer, and more inflexible. He contests that this can be proved by weighing the person before and after their death. Kassapa argues that the prince's own example proves the opposite: that the fact that the lightness, softness, and flexibility have gone out of the body shows that something has left the body, just as an iron ball is lighter, softer, and more flexible when it is hot, burning, and glowing. This is reminiscent of claims by some spiritualists and others that experiments have shown that the body loses a minute amount of weight at death. These claims are highly contested, however, even within the realm of parapsychology.

The prince is still not convinced. He cites another example, similar to the one he cited before, regarding seeing the soul emerging from a person half dead, even when they are beaten in various ways. Moreover, though they have senses they do not see other worlds (presumably, they are still able to speak and are cooperative). However, Kassapa argues from the same example that in the absence of life, heat, and consciousness (which he compares to a person, effort, and wind respectively) the body is not animated, thus proving the reality of another world.

Once again, the prince is not convinced, and produces another argument. This argument is nearly identical to the former one. In this case, instead of being a half-dead person, they progressively strip away a person's body parts, starting with their skin, obviously killing them in the process, yet no soul is found.

Finally, Kassapa, frustrated perhaps, tells the prince that his way of conceptualizing other worlds is faulty, which is why all his arguments come to naught. The prince is clearly a materialist, because his arguments only work if matter is the only reality. Even in that context, the argument has little merit since material things pass through other material things all the time (light through air, a gas through a membrane, fish through a net, etc.). All matter exhibits degrees of "subtlety."

The prince now seems to recognize the legitimacy of Kassapa's viewpoint, but at the same time he refuses to give up his opinion because giving it up is likely to damage his reputation. At this point,

the argument changes fundamentally. Kassapa turns his attention to Payasi himself, and tells him a series of stories designed to discredit him personally, including the story of a foolish caravan leader who, being told by an untrustworthy stranger that there were plenty of grass, water, and wood ahead, discarded his supplies and perished.

After some further exhortations by Kassapa, the prince finally admits that all he was really looking for from Kassapa was a good argument. At least, this seems to be Walshe's interpretation. In summary, the prince's argument amounts to little more than the assertion that because he does not know of any evidence of other worlds, he disbelieves in them, whereas Kassapa's best argument is that they are known and seen by those who know where to look and how. The prince converts and takes refuge as a lay follower of the Buddha.

THE GREAT SACRIFICE

The question of the existence of other worlds, devas, and karma resolved, the prince goes on to ask Kassapa for instructions on how to prepare a great sacrifice, presumably to honour his conversion to the dharma. Kassapa tells Payasi that animal sacrifice has no merit if the participants follow the wrong path, an "anti-path" in effect. In a strange anticipation of Jesus' parable of the seeds, Kassapa tells the story of a farmer who sows bad seeds in a bad place. On the other hand, a sacrifice where nothing is killed and the participants follow the Noble Eightfold Path has great merit. What sort of sacrifice is not explained, but it seems Kassapa is referring to the sangha, the members of which conduct the great sacrifice of collective renunciation.

Subsequently, the prince established a charity, but grudgingly, not with his own hands, and without proper concern. When Uttara, his Brahman administrator, who distributes the prince's largesse, grumbles about the quality of the merchandise, Payasi tells him that he expects to be rewarded for his generosity and tells Uttara to do what he wants. Because of his stinginess, Payasi is born in the

world of the Four Great Kings, in the empty Serisaka 'mansion' (*vihara,* lit. 'abode'). Uttara was born in the higher realm of the Thirty-Three. This story is known because the Ven. Gavampati, one of the Buddha's early converts, napped in the lower heavens (an allusion to lucid dreaming?). He encounters Payasi in the empty Serisaka mansion, and Payasi tells him the story. The sutta ends with the pious advice to be ungrudging in generosity in order to obtain a good rebirth.

ASSESSING THE ARGUMENTS

Payasi's arguments that other worlds, devas, and karma do not exist boil down to the argument that since he does not see physical evidence of such things, including a soul leaving the body at death, they do not exist.

These arguments are not unlike similar arguments made today, based on the view that only matter is real. On the other hand, Kassapa argues that other worlds, devas, and karma are observed in the heavens, and ascetics and Brahmans perceive them with the Divine Eye. Therefore, such things do exist. In fact, in modern terms, there is good circumstantial evidence for ghosts, "devas" (UFOs), and rebirth.[283]

[283] See Robert Almeder, *Death and Personal Survival*; Jacques Vallée, *Dimensions,* etc.; Ian Stephenson, *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*.

Division of Pattika the Naked Ascetic

About Patikaputta

Digha Nikaya 24

Country: Malla
Locale: Anupiya
Speakers: Bhaggava-gotta, the Buddha

Our translator, Maurice Walshe, comments that this sutta is the worst sutta in the Digha Nikaya. Still, we must consider its contents, without regard to its historicity, for non-historicity is not a warrant of falsehood and strict historicity, like authorial intent, cannot be established in any case. The Buddha is staying among the Mallas, a brave and warlike people who rejected monarchy and functioned as a republic. The small but powerful Malla state is located north of Magadha. Malla is the place in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta[284] where the Buddha sickens and dies. Divided into nine clan or tribal territories, each clan appointed members to the Santhagara, literally the 'House of Assembly.' Malla was annexed by Magadha soon after the Buddha's passing.

The name of the town where the Buddha is staying is Anupiya. Anupiya seems to have been a mango grove. Getting up too early in the morning to go into the village for alms, as was his wont, the Buddha resolves to visit Bhaggava-gotta in a park or monastery (*arama*). Walshe has 'hermitage.' Bhaggava-gotta is described as a wanderer. He welcomes the Buddha warmly and asks the Buddha if it is true that Sunakkhatta the Licchavi left the sangha (lit. 'rule'). Sunakhhatta the Licchavi is mentioned in sutta 6, when Otthaddha

[284] D 16.

the Licchavi asks the Buddha about Sunakkhatta's experience of divine visions but not divine sounds. The Licchavis are the major clan of the Vajji confederacy, east of Malla.

The Buddha confirms that Sunakhatta left the sangha and tells Bhaggava the story of his leaving, apparently with some relish. Sunakkhata (the Buddha says) went to the Buddha and told him that he is leaving the sangha, perhaps with some attitude, which the Buddha gives right back. The Buddha says, "Did I ever say to you: 'Come, ... be under my rule [sangha]'? ... Or did you ever say to me: 'Lord, I will be under your rule'?"[285] Sunakkhatta admits that he had not, which raises the question of Sunakkhatta's relationship with the Buddha. Later on, Sunakhatta is one of the Buddha's personal attendants. We know from other suttas that many of the Buddha's personal attendants before Ananda were unsatisfactory, suggesting the possibility of some sort of personal animosity on Sunakkhatta's part. Sunakkhatta seems to delight in chiding, challenging, and correcting the Buddha. Perhaps he had been ordained by another bhikku, a practice documented in the Pali Canon, so that Sunakkhatta had never met the Buddha before becoming his personal attendant. Perhaps the Buddha's curtness is also influenced by his perception of Sunakkhatta's hostility, which is overt in the Mahasihanada Sutta,[286] where he openly attacks the Buddha before the Vesali assembly of the Vajjians. In any case, the Buddha rebukes Sunakkhata for his importunity: "So, Sunakkhatta, if I did not say that to you and you did not say that to me—you foolish man, who are you and what are you giving up? Consider, foolish man, how far the fault is yours."[287] The Buddha seems to be saying, "Don't look to me because you've left the order; look to yourself, for the karma is yours." The impression is that Sunakkhatta is giving up something of great value without realizing it, and this is why the Buddha apparently derides him.

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[285] D 24.1.3.
[286] M 12.
[287] D 24.1.3.

Sunakkhatta complains to the Buddha that he has not performed any miracles or taught the origin of things. The Buddha reminds Sunakkhatta that he never promised to do this. He tells Sunakkhatta that the purpose of his teaching is the attainment of the cessation of angst, and that neither miracles nor teachings regarding the origin of things are relevant to this goal.

The Buddha describes the dharma as "visible here and now, timeless, inviting inspection, leading onward, to be realized by the wise, each one for himself."[288] Let us unpack this a little:

1. **Visible here and now:** The dharma is experienced in the moment. In this sense, it is the essential fact of reality. Thus, the moment itself is the essential reality.
2. **Timeless:** Dharma is the permanent, changeless truth of reality. It is immortal, and it confers immortality ("the deathless").
3. **Inviting inspection:** It is both attractive, because it confers happiness, and is able to be evaluated analytically.
4. **Leading onward:** It is a progressive praxis that builds on itself and so confers ever-increasing insight, culminating in enlightenment itself.
5. **Realized by the wise:** The dharma is the essential salvific principle; it is only attainable by those who know (i.e., have Right View).
6. **Each one for himself:** The path is unique and only available by means of direct realization by the individual, though individuals may choose to walk together—a paradoxical statement given that there is "no self," but also pointing beyond "no self" to the mental continuum or mind-stream, which brings us back to the moment.

Sunakhatta also used to praise the Buddha, dharma, and sangha, including the four grades of stream entrant, once returner, non-

[288] D 24.1.6.

returner, and arhant, divided into seekers and finders, making eight classes of people in all.

The sangha is described as "worthy of respect, worthy of homage, worthy of gifts, worthy of salutation, an unsurpassed field in the world for merit."[289] This passage alludes to a somewhat disconcerting Buddhist doctrine for some Westerners, that the amount of merit one generates, either for oneself or others, is directly proportional to the merit of the recipient of the act. In the case of renunciation, where the recipient of merit is oneself, the better a renouncer one is, the higher the quality of the merit that one generates for oneself. In the words of Jesus, "to those who have, more will be given, and from those who don't have, even what they do have will be taken away!"[290] This then becomes a karmic "energy bank" that can be saved, drawn upon, used, and transferred, just like money. This comparison might startle some, but Buddhism was as successful as it was in India largely due to the commercial class, who became members of the sangha and endowed it with parks, monasteries, and other gifts.[291] Merit behaves like money. The quality of one's personal merit increases exponentially. For this reason, absent the Buddha, the true sangha is the greatest source of merit, the actual repository of dharma.[292] This may be understood as a direct result of the Law of Karma, which underlies the merit generation process. Merit is simply the good quality of unfruited karmas that inhere in one's nature due to the quality of one's intentions expressed in deeds, words, and thoughts (body, speech, and mind).

The political implication of this doctrine is also apparent. The sangha operates as a kind of collective social conscience, devoid of obvious power yet influential, close to the people through the tie of alms, not involved in money, business, trade, politics, or the

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[289] Ibid.

[290] Mark 4:25, ASV.

[291] Thus, mercantile references and concepts pervade the Pali Canon.

[292] The Eighteen Schools are divided on whether venerating the Buddha or the sangha is the greater source of merit. The Kasyapiya held the former, the Mahisasaka the latter view.

householder world, internally based on a hierarchy of respect, common property, and mutually consensual discourse. Such an organization creates a karmic counterweight to the inherent tendency of samsara to degeneration, thus maintaining the "tone" of society without being involved in government.

The Buddha tells Sunakkhatta that people would say that he left the sangha because he could not handle the rules. The text says, "Sunakkhatta left this Dhamma and discipline like one condemned to hell."[293]

Here the sutta breaks off into a series of three short tales told by the Buddha, all designed to denigrate Sunakkhatta. Walshe notes that this is the only sutta in the Pali Canon in which the Buddha relates a narrative (as distinct from a discourse) to a third party.

The tale that the Buddha tells to Bhaggava relates an incident in the Buddha's life that occurred at a place called Uttaraka among the Khulus or Burus—the name of this obscure tribe is uncertain. One morning the Buddha goes into Uttaraka with Sunakkhatta as his attendant. A naked ascetic called Korakkhattiya (lit. 'dog-man') was going about on all fours. This kind of asceticism seems to have been popular in Asia. Seniya is another ascetic who imitated a dog, like the Chinese Taoist mystic Ge Xuan (trad. 164–244 CE), who went about as a pig for seven years in order to prove his holiness. Sunakkhatta is impressed by Korakkhattiya, to the Buddha's consternation. When the Buddha questions Sunakkhatta's judgment, Sunakkhatta is defensive: "Does the Blessed Lord begrudge others their Arahantship?" The Buddha's answer is revealing: "I do not begrudge others their Arahantship, you foolish man. It's only in you that this evil view has arisen."[294] The Buddha's answer echoes Kassapa's reference to Brahman ascetics in sutta 23—he seems to imply that other *samanas* are capable of arhantship. In other words, the Buddha is non-sectarian. The Buddha's objection to Sunakkhatta's implicit accusation of bias is that Korakkhattiya has no following.

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[293] D 24.1.6.
[294] D 24.1.7.

He is generating the karma of his own downfall; thus, he cannot be on the right path because his karmic fruit is bad. To prove this the Buddha predicts that Korakkattiya will die of indigestion before long and so he did.

The sutta gives us a rare glimpse into the typology of the anti-gods. The Buddha says that Korakkhattiya will be reborn among the Kalakanjas (Kalakeyas), the very lowest grade of anti-god. These beings appear in sutta 20, where they are among the host of devas who worship the Buddha and are called "terrible to behold." In Hinduism, a powerful, cruel, and ferocious clan of Danavas—a race descending from Daksha, one of the sons of Lord Brahma—hide in the sea to avoid Indra after he kills their leader, the demon Vritasura. In Buddhist lore, the Kalakanjas are said to suffer from excessive thirst, rather like the Chinese conception of 'hungry ghosts' (Chinese *ergui*; Pali *peta*). The Kalakanjas resemble the *petas* in shape, sex life, diet, and longevity. They also intermarry with them—thus establishing that different classes of beings can intermarry in the Buddhist universe, an interesting concept also hinted at in the Bible. In Vodou, marriages with spiritual beings (*loas*) are legally recognized and socially accepted.

The Buddha invites Sunakkhatta to verify this for himself, which he does by performing an act of what amounts to necromancy—the magical art of divining using corpses—with the corpse of Korakkhattiya, which he finds on a heap of grass in a charnel ground. Striking the body three times with his hand, Sunakkhatta cries out, "Friend Korakkhattiya, do you know your fate?" The corpse sits up, rubs his back with his hand, and says, "Friend Sunakkhatta, I know my fate. I have been reborn among the Kalakanja asuras."[295] The corpse then falls back, dead again. Witches and sorcerers in Europe reputedly performed this type of divination during the Middle Ages.

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[295] D 24.1.9.

Afterward, the Buddha reminds Sunakkhatta of his complaint that the Buddha has not performed a miracle. Sunakkhatta admits that he has, and leaves the sangha in disgrace.

The Buddha tells a parallel story, which takes place at the Gabled Hall in the Great Forest of Vesali, the capital of the Vajjis. Here he tells the story of Kalaramutthaka. Kalaramutthaka had undertaken seven rules of practice:

1. Living as a naked ascetic;
2. Chastity;
3. Subsisting on strong meat and drink, like the tantrics, and abstaining from boiled rice and sour milk; and
4. – 7. Remaining within a square defined by four shrines [Udena (e.), Gotamaka (s.), Sattamba (w.), Bahuputta (n)].— (D 16.32)

(I have followed Walshe's punctuation in numbering the foregoing.)

Sunakkhatta visits Kalamutthaka and asks him a question that he cannot answer, whereupon Kalamutthaka becomes enraged. Sunakkhatta feels that Kalamutthaka is a true arhant, so he withdraws out of fear that he has offended the ascetic. The Buddha reminds Sunakhatta of this, and prophesies that Kalamutthaka will become a married householder and lose his reputation as an ascetic. Sunakkhatta acknowledges his error and leaves the sangha in disgrace.[296]

A third time the Buddha tells a parallel story, this time of Patikaputta, the name that seems to be referred to in the title of the sutta. A naked ascetic also living in Vesali, Patikaputta claims to be able to make twice as many miracles as the Buddha and challenges the Buddha to a contest, but the Buddha says that Patikaputta is not able to meet him face to face. Curiously, Sunakkhatta

[296] Perhaps these are past life stories, though there is no indication in the sutta that they are.

asks the Buddha if he knows this from his own knowledge or whether a deva told him. The Buddha answers that he knows it both from his own knowledge *and from devas.* This stock passage occurs in other suttas too, implying that *the Buddha communicated with devas and that they inspired the dharma, at least in part.* The Buddha tells Sunakkhatta to invite Patikaputta to come to him in Patikaputta's park at any time. Hearing of this, many Licchavis—the sutta improbably says in the hundreds and thousands—come to Patikaputta's park to watch the contest. Patikaputta, afraid, tries to hide in the wanderers' lodging. This flowering, insect resistant *tinduka* tree is long-lived, slow growing, and tall, with a thick black trunk and round, yellow, astringent fruits.

The assembled company sends several people to persuade him to come, but Patikaputta cannot move off his seat, try as he might, like they are hypnotized. Jaliya, a pupil of the wooden bowl ascetic, who is mentioned in suttas 6 and 7, compares Patikaputta to a jackal who feeds off the leavings of the Buddha lion.

Instead, the Buddha gives a dharma talk in Patikaputta's park, which "delivered them all from the great bondage."[297] The meaning of this statement is obscure, and could mean anything from entering the path to experiencing emancipation. Entering into ecstasy by "the method of flame," the Buddha rises into the air and projects a beam of light, equal to the height of seven palm trees, that blazes and sheds fragrance, and transports himself to the Gabled Hall of the Great Forest.[298] Note the recurrence of the symbolic number seven, which we frequently find in the Pali Canon. Once again, the Buddha shames Sunakkhatta into admitting that he has performed a miracle, whereupon Sunakkhatta leaves the sangha in disgrace.

After telling these stories, the Buddha says to Bhaggava, "Bhaggava, I know the first beginning of things, and I know not only that but what surpasses it in value. And I am not under the sway of

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[297] D 24.13.

[298] More evidence of a proto-tantric thread in the Pali Canon. Comparison with the UFO phenomenon is also suggestive.

what I know, and not being under its sway I have come to know for myself that quenching (*nibbuti*), by the realization of which the Tathagata cannot fall into perilous paths (*anaya*, lit. 'misfortune')."[299] Here the Buddha explains somewhat his antipathy to speculative metaphysics, not because there are no such truths ("I know the first beginning of things") but because they are inferior and because they can lead to attachment that can lead to rebirth in just such a world as one imagines; thus one continues to experience angst.

To demonstrate his knowledge, the Buddha enters into a discourse on theism, similar to sutta 11. The Buddha says that he went to those ascetics and Brahmans who believe that everything begins with creation by a god, but they could not give a reasonable answer to how this came about. The Buddha says that when the world contracts, beings are reborn in the Abhassara Brahma world, which actually refers to the top plane of the Radiant Devas next above the Brahma worlds. Then, when the world expands again, a deva falls into what he calls "an empty brahma palace," like the empty mansion where Payasi is reborn in the Payasi Sutta.[300] Experiencing loneliness, other beings appear and he and they all believe that he created them. Thus, the delusion of theism arises. This story is told in other suttas too.

The Buddha goes on to explain the origin of the "Corrupted by Pleasure" and "Corrupted in Mind" devas, referred to in sutta 1. Such beings fall into lower realms because of excessive merriment or envy respectively, and thus give rise to beliefs that the world is caused by sensual or mental corruption. Finally, he explains the origin of the Unconscious Devas (*asannasatta*), who occupy the realm between the Five Pure Abodes and the Very Fruitful Devas (*vehapphala*). The Unconscious Devas are so-called because they seek to escape angst in unconscious meditative states. These beings are associated with the belief that the world arises according to

[299] D 24.2.14.
[300] D 24.

chance. The Unconscious Devas are reborn with no memory, thus concluding that everything comes out of non-being by chance. Interestingly, this state is not too unlike the human, who also believe that everything arises by chance because memories of past births are rare.

The Buddha complains that others accuse him of being on the wrong track (*viparito*), declaring that whoever has reached the grade of "the beautiful" (*subha*), referring to the third liberation in sutta 15, which Walshe interprets as a jhana-like stage of concentration, finds everything repulsive. We have addressed this in connection with the meditation on the repulsiveness of the body in sutta 22. However, the Buddha says that he does not teach this. Rather, the Buddha says that whoever attains the grade of the Beautiful experiences it (the grade? existence?) as beautiful. This seems like the experience of the Buddha's mother, Maya, during his gestation.

The Buddha tells Bhaggava that it is hard for him, as a follower of a different philosophy, to attain the state called the Beautiful. However, Bhaggava says that, though he belongs to a different sect, he will place his trust in the Buddha—an ambiguous statement at best, which might imply conversion, merely appreciation, or even a polite exit.

The Lion's Roar at Udumbarika

Digha Nikaya 25

Country: Magadha
Locale: Vulture's Peak, Rajagaha
Speakers: Nigrodha, Sandhana, the Buddha

This sutta is spoken at the Vulture's Peak, near Rajagaha, in Magadha, which is also mentioned in the Great Lion's Roar[301] and at the opening of the Mahaparinibbana Sutta,[302] and in 19, a deva sutta. In sutta 8 the Buddha is approached by Nigrodha, described as a "certain practitioner of mortification," who consults the Buddha about the practice of austerity and is delighted by the Buddha's reply. The Nigrodha of this sutta is described as a wanderer and the topic is self-mortification, so it seems likely that the two Nigrodhas are the same.

The householder Sandhana comes early in the morning to see the Buddha, but he discovers that they are in retreat so he goes to the Udumbarika lodging, named after Queen Udumbarika, to see Nigrodha instead. He finds Nigrodha in the middle of a large crowd of wanderers, all noisily talking about different topics. Nigrodha sees Sandhana coming in the distance and silences the wanderers. Sandhana must have heard them anyway, because the first thing he

[301] D 8.
[302] D 16.

mentions is to point out that the followers of other sects are noisy, whereas the followers of the Buddha are quiet. Nigrodha asks Sandhana where the Buddha gets his "lucidity of wisdom" and suggests that his mental sharpness has been blunted by renunciation. Nigrodha suggests that if the Buddha comes to the Udumbarika lodging he will be quickly defeated in argument.

It seems that public open-air debates like this were popular in ancient India; the tradition is preserved in the Tibetan tradition. The Buddha descends from Vulture's Peak and walks up and down—walking meditation?—beside the Sunagadha Tank in the Peacocks' Feeding Ground. This must be near the Udumbarika lodging, since Nigrodha catches sight of him. Again, he hushes the wanderers, hoping that the Buddha might join them. When he does come, Nigrodha's obsequious hypocrisy is all the more blatant in light of his derision of the Buddha.

Nigrodha asks the Buddha: "What is this doctrine in which the Blessed Lord trains his disciples and which those disciples whom he has so trained as to benefit from it recognise as their principal support, and the perfection of the holy life?"[303]

Rather than answer the question, the Buddha tells Nigrodha that it is hard for adherents of different views to understand the dharma. Instead, he asks Nigrodha to tell him about his doctrine of extreme austerity. The wanderers are excited about the Buddha appearing to turn the tables on Nigrodha, something to which the wanderers seem to be prone. Specifically, the Buddha asks him how the conditions of austerity and self-mortification are and are not fulfilled.

Nigrodha's answer is that they regard the higher austerities as essential. Strangely, he then asks the Buddha another question in return: "What constitutes [the] fulfillment or non-fulfillment [of the higher austerities]?"[304] The Buddha summarizes all he ascetic practices that we reviewed in sutta 8. Clearly, all these were practised by ascetics of the Buddha's time and, presumably, by the Buddha

[303] D 25.7.
[304] D 25.8.

himself during his six years of asceticism. The Buddha asks Nigrodha if he believes that these practices fulfill the higher austerity. Nigrodha says that they do. The Buddha tells Nigrodha that this higher austerity can be faulted in various ways, including self-righteousness, pride, enmity, carelessness, worldliness, jealousy, ostentation, deceitfulness, ill temperament, and extremism, among others. However, a self-mortifier who does not fall into these errors is purified. Nevertheless, Nigrodha sees a self-mortifier purified of these things as attaining the "peak and the pith" of attainment, introducing the metaphor of the heartwood developed in sutta 18 of the Majjhima Nikaya. In that sutta, the various layers of a tree trunk are identified with different degrees of attainment, culminating in the attainment of the heartwood or pith, which corresponds to enlightenment itself. Nigrodha thinks that the self-mortifier, purified of the evils itemized by the Buddha, has reached the pith, but the Buddha says that he has merely reached the outer bark.

Nigrodha asks the Buddha to explain how the self-mortifier penetrates to the pith. The Buddha says that he must practise the **Fourfold Restraint.** As we know, the Five Precepts (*pansil*), not to kill, not to steal, not to engage in adultery, not to lie, and not to drink alcohol, often omit the fifth precept—the prohibition of drinking alcohol—quite frequently, suggesting that these suttas might predate the alcohol prohibition. Here we have a name—the Fourfold Restraint—given to just this set of four precepts: not harming (instead of not killing), not stealing, not lying, and not craving sense pleasures (instead of not engaging in adultery), including not engaging in the activity, not being the cause of the activity being engaged in by somebody else, and not advocating or defending the activity. Here we see what seems to be an original fourfold form of pansil. This furthers the self-mortifier in the upward path.

Next, he sits cross-legged in a secluded place, "establishing mindfulness before him."[305] We have discussed the etymology of the word 'awareness' (Pali *sati*) before. In general, I prefer 'attention' or

[305] D 25.16.

'attentiveness.' Walshe consistently interprets awareness as ***awareness of the breathing.*** One abandons all bad thoughts and emotions and practises **compassion** toward all living beings, the **perception of light**, and **calming the heart-mind** (*citta*). The perception of light refers to a visualization of the body enveloped by light, even self-identification with the Buddha visualized as a body of light. In Pali, *citta* means both 'heart' and 'mind.' Calming the 'heart-mind' suggests what is now called *samatha,* 'tranquility' meditation.

Having abandoned the five hindrances of sensory desire, anger, sloth-torpor, restlessness-worry, and doubt by these methods, one practises the well-known **metta meditation,** pervading the four quarters with compassion. *The Buddha says that one who follows the path to this point has penetrated to the inner bark.* The metta meditation seems to be distinguished from practising compassion toward all living beings; perhaps the former is more akin to actual practical generosity (a qualification of a bodhisattva) than to a formal meditation. Elsewhere the metta meditation is only said to result in rebirth in the Brahma world, not arhantship.

To progress further, the self-mortifier must **recall their past lives.** The Buddha says that one who has realized this level has penetrated the fibres surrounding the pith.

To progress further one must **purify the Divine Eye,** which gives insight into the inner workings of karma. The Buddha says that such a one has penetrated to the pith.

Here we see what seems to be an early attempt to work out the architectonics of "the path," consisting of methods and attainments ("paths" and "fruits"), based on the "ground" of the **Fourfold Restraint.** The Buddha says to Nigrodha, "when you ask: 'What, Lord, is this doctrine in which the Blessed Lord trains his disciples, and which those disciples whom he has so trained as to benefit from it recognise as their principal support, and the perfection of the holy life.' I say that it is by something more far-reaching and excellent that I train them, through which they...recognise as their principal

support, and the perfection of the holy life."[306] This passage is not entirely clear, but based on the reply of the wanderers it seems that the Buddha means that his dharma transcends Nigrodha's comprehension.

In any case, the assembled wanderers start clamouring again, declaring Nigrodha and themselves defeated. Sandhana mocks Nigrodha: "Why don't you baffle him with a single question and knock him over like an empty pot."[307] The irony is delicious.

The Buddha chastises Nigrodha for not considering that the Buddha might actually be telling the truth, since the Buddha abides in the condition of true emancipation. Nigrodha confesses his fault and the Buddha excuses him. This ritual of public confession is repeated by the monastics during the night of every new and full moon, when the monastics voluntarily admit their faults and execute whatever penance is required by the rules. For many minor transgressions, like drinking alcohol, confession alone is enough. As a transgression, drinking alcohol ranked with tickling, playing in the water, and too-frequent bathing. This might surprise some people, who are constantly being told by religious fundamentalists that drinking alcohol is a major transgression. The Vinaya itself says that it is not, even for monastics, and it was added to the Fourfold Restraint to make the Five Precepts later in the Buddha's career, after a monastic had embarrassed the sangha.

The Buddha accepts Nigrodha's confession, and tells him that he instructs anyone who is intelligent, sincere, honest, and straightforward. In sutta 22, the Buddha says that anyone who practises meditation even for a minimum of one week will either attain arhantship or stream entry within seven rebirths at most. Here the Buddha says that if one practises dharma for at least seven days, they will attain "to that unequalled holy life and goal, for the sake of which young men of good family go forth from the household

[306] D 25.19.
[307] D 25.20.

life into homelessness."[308] I am not aware of any passage that clarifies what the Buddha means exactly by meditating for seven days. Does he mean meditating for 168 hours continuously without sleep? This is an altogether more demanding regimen than meditating eight hours a day, for example. When the Buddha attained nirvana, he remained entranced continuously for seven days.

Next, the Buddha explicitly repudiates sectarianism:

> You may think: 'the ascetic Gotama says this in order to get disciples.' But you should not regard it like that. Let him who is your teacher remain your teacher. Or you may think: 'He wants us to abandon our rules.' Let your rules remain as they are. Or you may think: 'He wants us to abandon our way of life.' But you should not regard it like that. Let your way of life remain as it was. Or you may think: 'He wants to establish us in the doing of things that according to our teaching was wrong, and are so considered among us.' But you should not regard it like that. Let those things you consider wrong continue to be so considered. Or you may think: 'He wants to draw us away from things that according to our teaching are good, and are so considered among us.' But you should not regard it like that. Let whatever you consider right continue to be so considered. Nigrodha, I do not speak for any of these reasons. (23)

Therefore, the Buddha's dharma transcends the wanderers as well as teachers, rules, ways of life, and ethics. **The Buddha's dharma is not a religion.** *It is higher and more universal than religion.* Rather, it is more a constructive critique of religion—a meta-religion. It is not reducible to historically or geographically contingent categories, and when historically or geographically contingent categories are superimposed on it, they lead to the same error as the wanderers—the belief that adherence to external rites, rituals, and dogmatic beliefs are essential for emancipation.

Rather, the Buddha says that the dharma consists of understanding the mechanics of karma, by abandoning the corruptions and

[308] D 25.22.

cultivating those things that conduce to purification through practice: "If you practice accordingly, these tainted things will be abandoned, and the things that make for purification will develop and grow, and you will all attain to and dwell, in this very life, by your own insight and realisation, in the fullness of perfected wisdom."[309] Note, once again, the identification of "perfect wisdom" as the essential salvific principle, as well as the Buddha's declaration that all will attain.

The wanderers fall silent, but none converts, causing the Buddha to declare them all foolish and possessed by Mara, the anti-god of desirous attachment, who binds us to the cycle of life and death by seducing us with our own desires. Whether the Buddha's reference to possession is meant to be taken literally or as a manner of speech is uncertain, but possession is practised in some forms of Buddhism, notably in Tibet and Southeast Asia. The Buddha reiterates that emancipation can be attained in as few as seven days, whereupon he returns to Vulture's Peak. Sandhana too returns to Rajagaha.

[309] D 25.23. Note that the Buddha implies that all *samanas* are capable of attaining Perfect Wisdom.

The Lion's Roar on the Wheel Turning Monarch

Digha Nikaya 26

Country: Magadha
Locale: Mutula
Speaker: the Buddha

The motif of the "lion's roar" (*sihanada*), which also refers to a "brave speech"—PED has "a song of ecstasy; a shout of exaltation"—reoccurs frequently. It appears in the title of three suttas.[310] It is used to refer to the *Buddhavacana* and the certainty that it creates, and it is also ironic. The second division of the Majjhima Nikaya, consisting of ten suttas, is also called the Lion's Roar, as are two suttas in the set.[311] The metaphor is obvious. Just as the lion is the lord of the forest, so too is the Buddha the lord of the sangha. Nanamoli and Bodhi say that "a 'lion's roar,' according to MA [*Majjhima Nikaya Atthakatha*], is a roar of supremacy and fearlessness, a roar that cannot be confuted."[312] In addition, the Buddha is reputed to be descended from the sun, and the lion is a universal solar symbol.

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[310] D 8, 25, 26.
[311] D 11, 12.
[312] *Middle Length Discourses* , p. 1194, n. 166.

The Mahasihanada Sutta[313] demonstrates the Buddha's claim to Buddhahood and his path being the supreme dharma. In the Udumbarika-Sihanada Sutta, [314] the Buddha proclaims the true dharma that transcends the dharma of the wanderers. In addition, in the Cakkavatti-Sihanada Sutta,[315] the Buddha reveals the secret of how to access the power of the dharma that confers emancipation. This sutta feels like a manual, much like the Mahasatipatthana Sutta.[316]

THE DHARMA REFUGE

We find the Buddha in Matula, Magadha. This town is not described in the sutta. Here the Buddha recites his famous pronouncement, which highlights and distills expressions found elsewhere in the suttas: "Monks, be islands unto yourselves, be a refuge unto yourselves with no other refuge. Let the Dhamma be your island; let the Dhamma be your refuge, with no other refuge."[317] Walshe notes that there is a possibility that the word (*dipa*) translated 'island' (Skt. *dvipa*) in this passage may actually mean 'lamp' (Skt. *dipa*). The word also means 'help, support,' which seems to be the most probable meaning given the subsequent reference to "refuge" ("guiding light"?). It is also possible that the Buddha is employing a double entendre, common in Pali.

THE FOUR ATTENTIONS

The Buddha asks, "How does one dwell as a refuge unto oneself?"[318] The answer is that the monastic observes the Four Attentions, discussed in connection with the Mahasatipatthana Sutta.[319] These

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[313] D 8.
[314] D 25.
[315] D 26.
[316] D 22.
[317] D 26.1.
[318] Ibid.
[319] D 22.

consist in cultivating naked attention directed toward the body, feelings, mind, and mind-objects.

WHAT ARE THE "ANCESTRAL HAUNTS"?

He concludes with the advice that follows: "Keep to your own preserves [or 'pastures'] (*gocare*), monks, to your ancestral haunts (*pettike visaye*). If you do so, then Mara will find no lodgement, no foothold. It is just by the building-up of wholesome states that this merit increases."[320] What is the Buddha actually saying here? *Gocara* means 'suitable place.' *Visaya* means 'locality,' and *pettika,* from *peta,* 'gone before,' means 'paternal.' The Buddha may be alluding to the forest, the traditional dwelling of Buddhist monastics, which the Buddha recommends frequently, the implication being that in the absence of temptations, good states and merit increase. This is the end of the sutta, to which, as we see elsewhere, a story has been spliced on, in this case with no segue whatsoever.

THE SACRED WHEEL TREASURE

The story concerns a king called Dalhanemi, described as "a righteous monarch of the law, conqueror of the four quarters, who had established the security of his realm and was possessed of the seven treasures."[321] King Mahasuddassana of Kusinara, famous for Ananda's calling it "a miserable little town of wattle and daub"[322] shortly before the Buddha's passing in the Mahasudassana Sutta,[323] was a wheel-turning king. We discussed the meaning of the seven treasures in connection with that sutta. Here, as there, we are mainly interested in the Wheel Treasure. When the Wheel treasure slips from its position, the king is to die soon. The king appoints his oldest son, the Crown Prince, to take over running the state, and joins the sangha in anticipation of his death. Seven days later, the

[320] Ibid.
[321] D 26.2.
[322] D 17.1.3.
[323] D 17.

Wheel Treasure vanishes. His son goes to the "royal sage" and tells him that the Wheel Treasure is gone. The king explains that the Wheel Treasure is not a hereditary possession, but that his son must earn it. If he does so, then on the *uposatha* day that Wheel Treasure may appear to him too. Incidentally, a golden wheel, quite large and heavy looking, is presented to the young Dalai Lama at his coronation in Scorsese's movie *Kundun*. This is the Wheel Treasure, which identifies the Dalai Lama as a "royal sage." Sometimes this is translated as "prince-priest."[324]

THE ROLE OF THE WHEEL TURNING KING

The duty of a wheel-turning king is fivefold: to (1) honour the Dharma by maintaining the state based on the legal, ethical, and political philosophy of Buddhism, (2) establish the security of the state, including protecting the environment, (3) establish justice, (4) provide welfare for those in need, and (5) advise the sangha on matters of practical policy. Thus, it is explicit that Buddhism is a political-spiritual philosophy, not merely spiritual.[325] The equal emphasis on security, justice, and welfare sounds positively modern. The role of the wheel-turning king in connection with ethics is interesting. The king seems to be a supremely enlightened householder, whose legal and ethical character is unimpeachable—ideally—so that in relation to the sangha he exercises the role of a worldly advisor, like a chaplain in reverse. Once again, the Buddha makes the sangha dependent on the people for alms, so that the sangha should always be subject to the people and not the reverse. The Buddha was not trying to establish a theocracy.

King Dalhanemi's son rules righteously, and one day when the king is on his verandah at the top of his palace after washing his head, observing the *uposatha,* the Wheel Treasure appears to him: "The sacred Wheel Treasure appeared to him, thousand-spoked,

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[324] See Allen, *The Buddha and Dr. Führer,* chap. 7.

[325] One may doubt whether any religion is "merely spiritual," which may explain why militant secularism and scientism hate it increasingly.

complete with feloe, hub and all appurtenances."[326] In sutta 17, King Mahasudassana conquers his neighbours peaceably through the power of dharma, led on by the Wheel Treasure, which appears as a luminous flying object that guides him from place to place, as though it has intelligence. Here the story is similar. It is clearly an allegory for the idea of the power of the state being governed by ethics, identified with dharma, and expanding to include neighbouring states under the same regimen, thus eventually establishing a pacific global dharma empire. King Dalhanemi's dharma society was based on six precepts:

- Do not kill.
- Respect property.
- Do not commit adultery.
- Do not lie.
- Do not drink strong drink.
- Be moderate in eating.

Establishing a society based on these principles is less obvious than first appears. The modern world violates every one of them, thus bringing on Western society the same karma that it imposes on others.

Moderation in eating is one of the most important precepts of the Vinaya for the monastics. This story reminds one of Moses bringing down the tablets of the law in Exodus.

THE BUDDHIST VIEW OF HISTORY

King Dalhanemi's son dies and is succeeded by a succession of wheel-turning kings, seven in all (the text does not count King Dalhanemi himself as one).

[326] D 26.5.

The last royal sage in this succession, which obviously lasted many thousands, perhaps even millions of years,[327] is told that the Wheel Treasure slipped from its position. In accordance with the custom, the royal sage ordains as a monastic and prepares to die. Seven days later, the Wheel Treasure disappears.

The eighth successor does not consult his predecessor regarding the duties of a wheel-turning king. Instead, he decides to govern based on his own views, resulting in an overall reduction of the prosperity of the people. Clearly, the Buddha is interested in economic ways of thinking. In response to the criticism of his ministers and others, he consults them on the duties of a wheel-turning king, and based on their advice he establishes "guard and protection," but he does not establish a welfare system. A conservative, presumably! As a result, the Buddha traces a logical progression, similar to interdependent origination, in which not giving property to the needy results in widespread stealing. Because of the increase in stealing, the king is coerced into giving property to those who steal. As a result, an epidemic of stealing breaks out.

The Buddha clearly understands the intricacies of effective statecraft and the concept of "unintended consequences" in addition to the Law of Karma. In response to the epidemic of stealing, the king institutes beheading. As a result, some people begin to steal other people's property and cut off their heads, resulting in gangsterism. As a result, the longevity and beauty of the people falls. Over time, the quality and length of life falls dramatically. Also lying, gossip, adultery, harsh speech and idle chatter, covetousness and hatred, false opinions, incest, greed, "deviant practices," and lack of respect for authority have all been progressively increasing during historical times.[328]

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[327] The period implied between successive appearances of the Wheel Treasures is described as "many hundreds and thousands of years." Eight periods are implied from the accession of Dalhanemi to the accession of his seventh successor.

[328] The Buddhist suttas make extensive use of number symbolism, including the numbers 80 and 84 and their multiples and submultiples (e.g., $84 = 7 \times 12$), including 80,000, 84,000, 8,400,000, etc. These numbers are significant to the Buddhists,

Miccha-dhamma is translated by Walshe as 'deviant practices,' apparently influenced by the commentary. The dictionary definition of *dhamma* is 'doctrine,' 'nature,' 'truth,' 'the Norm,' 'morality,' 'good conduct.' *Miccha* is 'untruth,' 'falsehood,' 'false,' 'wrongly,' 'wrong.' To my ear, "deviant practices" has a connotation that is not borne out by these definitions: "false beliefs or wrong behaviour" seems like a more accurate rendering.

This brings us to the extended present of history, when the human lifespan is about a hundred years. According to the Buddhist world-view, the continuing decline of dharma results in a future deterioration in the quality of human life, until human morality itself disappears and humans revert to the animal state: "All will be promiscuous in the world like goats and sheep, fowl and pigs, dogs and jackals. Among them, fierce enmity will prevail one for another, fierce hatred, fierce anger and thoughts of killing, mother against child and child against mother, father against child and child against father, brother against brother, brother against sister, just as the hunter feels hatred for the beast he stalks."[329]

The progression in this succession of world-turning kings, beginning with eighty thousand years, falls at a regular rate.[330]

Jains, Brahmans, and the Ajivikas. These numbers and their variations represent the dimensions of the four "bounded planes" of the world of Sensual Desire, the height and depth of Mount Meru, the number of suttas in the Pali Canon, the lifespan of the Buddha, the number of Buddhist laws and the number of practices taught by the Buddha, the number of stupas of the Buddha, the number of hells, the number of the Tibetan *mahasiddhas* (realized beings), and the number of minor physical characteristics of the Buddha, among other things. Thus, these numbers symbolize notions of greatness and completion; the reference to 314,695 years is also symbolic. However, the implication still is that people vary extensively in both their longevity and their degree of spiritual development, which are correlated. Since people originate in the world of the radiant devas, and are therefore in the negative or "discharge" phase of their developmental cycle, this need not imply that such longevities or their cycles are terrestrial in nature.

[329] D 26.20.

[330] Based on the sutta, the total duration of an *antarakappa* is 80,000 + 40,000 + 20,000 + 10,000 + 5,000 + 2,500 + 1,000 + 500 + 250 + 100 + 10 + 20 + 40 + 80 + 160 + 320 + 640 + 2,000 + 4,000 + 8,000 + 20,000 + 40,000 + 80,000 = 314,620 years,

The nadir of this process is the advent of the *satthantarakappa* (Pali *sattha* + *antarakappa),* when the majority of people kill each other off in a relatively short time, "mistak[ing] one another for wild beasts,"[331] nearly destroying human civilization. This apocalyptic reversal is designated by the term *sattanatarakappa.* Walshe translates this as 'sword-interval,' but another meaning of *sattha* is 'science.' Thus, we may translate the name as 'age of science.'[332] Clearly, we are currently living in the descending arc of this cycle.

There is a common view, upheld in the Lotus Sutra, that a buddha always appears at the nadir of the historical cycle. However, this view is not borne out by the suttas.

TWO KINDS OF BEINGS

For the duration of the sword interval, a remnant of those humans who eschew violence survive in remote, inhospitable, and inaccessible places. After the majority of the race destroys itself, these people emerge and establish a new civilization based on the precepts of the dharma, which is clearly not forgotten. At the end of this evolutionary arc, greed, fasting, and old age are the only kinds of disease known. Jambudvipa—the Indian subcontinent—identified with the realm of humans and the dharma itself, will be powerful and prosperous, with numerous highly populated villages, towns, and cities. Using the same methodology as above, the time from the sword interval to the beginning of the final phase of the evolutionary arc is about eighty thousand years in the future, after the

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divided into devolutionary and evolutionary arcs of roughly 160,000 years each, despite the traditional view that it is "incalculable."

[331] See D 26.21.

[332] Thus, we may identify the "age of swords" with the scientific or industrial revolution, referring perhaps to the destructive, anti-human effects of the ideology of "scientific" materialism (which includes philosophical materialism, Newtonian science, industrialism, social Darwinism, communism, fascism, and technocracy) generally, which are by no means past. William Blake (b. 1757) is one of the early prophets of this in the West. Thus, we are technically still in this "fascist" period of human history, dominated by the anti-god mode of consciousness.

age of science, which occurred between 1543 and 1687,[333] culminating in the Industrial Revolution starting in 1757.[334] If we identify this period with the sword interval, then we must consider ourselves to be at the threshold of the evolutionary arc. Further population die-offs and economic disruptions seem likely because of climate change and environmental devastation generally, with the possibility of local nuclear or biochemical attacks or accidents. This process is already in progress. The First World War saw sixteen million causalities. The Second World War saw twelve million dead. The Holocaust added another eleven million. To this, we must add the slave trade, the modern history of which begins in the 17th century, not long after the advent of finance capitalism, which still afflicts untold millions. It seems that we are hell bent on destroying the planet and each other as soon as possible.

THE COMING OF MAITREYA

The age, perhaps roughly eighty thousand years hence, when humans finally achieve greatly enhanced human longevity, disease is nearly unknown, and prosperity is universal, characterized by high-density housing and a large population with many cities (the sutta literally says that it is as crowded as hell), will be a veritable golden age. This vision is exactly the scientific utopian vision of the future, which one also finds in the Kalachakra prophecies regarding the dharma society of the future, Shambhala. This may surprise those

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[333] "While its dates are disputed, the publication in 1543 of Nicolaus Copernicus's *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* (*On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres*) is often cited as marking the beginning of the scientific revolution, and its completion is attributed to the 'grand synthesis' of Newton's 1687 *Principia*." (Wikipedia, s.v. Scientific Revolution)

[334] In addition to marking the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, 1757 is the year in which the great Swedish mystic, Emanuel Swedenborg, sees the Apocalypse and in which the great English bodhisattva, poet, and painter, William Blake, is born. In Tibet, Jigme Lingpa discovers the Longchen Nyingthig *terma* treasure, which gives a systematic exposition of Dzogchen, in 1757, marking the authentic historical beginning of the "new age."

who believe in a kind of neo-Taoist Buddhism of "return to nature," though the two views are not incompatible.

There is a common view that buddhas make their appearance near the nadir of human civilization. While this is true of Gotama, it is not true of the buddhas before him, nor is it true of Maitreya, the Coming Buddha, who appears at the zenith of human civilization and life span. Says the sutta,

> In that time of the people with an eighty thousand year life-span, there will arise in the world a Blessed Lord, an Arahant fully enlightened Buddha named Metteyya, endowed with wisdom and conduct, a Well-Farer, Knower of the Worlds, incomparable Trainer of men to be tamed, Teacher of gods [*devas*] and humans, enlightened and blessed, just as I am now. He will thoroughly know by his own superknowledge, and proclaim, this universe with its devas and maras and Brahmas, its ascetics and Brahmins, and this generation with its princes and people, just as I do now. He will teach the Dhamma, lovely in its beginning, lovely in its middle, lovely in its ending, in the spirit and in the letter, and proclaim, just as I do now, the holy life in its fullness and purity. He will be attended by a company of thousands of monks, just as I am attended by a company of hundreds. (25)

Many people all through history have identified themselves with Maitreya, beginning with Wu Zetian (624–705), the empress of China, who ruthlessly persecuted her opponents in the royal family by cutting off their arms and legs and inserting them in jars, and, most recently, Ram Bahadur Bomjon (b. 1990), a Nepalese nicknamed "Buddha Boy." However, disregarding the claims regarding the longevity of people, it is clear that the essential conditions of Maitreya's coming, viz., a global human die-off followed by a cultural revolution, the establishment of a new dharma society, and the appearance of a universal golden age, have yet to be fulfilled. According to the sutta, these are preconditions of Maitreya's appearance, not the result of it. Maitreya will teach the dharma in its perfection, both exoteric and esoteric, but his sangha will be ten times greater than that of Gotama. This will only come about, in

accordance with the Law of Karma, when the time and the conditions are right.

THE DHARMA REFUGE

The Buddha reiterates the advice to the monastics to be refuges unto themselves, with no refuge other than the dharma itself. Once again, the Buddha emphasizes that emancipation is an individual endeavour. One is not saved by anyone or anything outside one's self, which raises an interesting quandary for those who believe that the Buddha denies the existence of a self, as distinct from a certain kind of self or a certain way of seeing the self. He even says that the individual alone is their own refuge, with no other refuge—a startling thought given the great religious solemnity of the Three Jewels. Have Buddhists been taking refuge in the wrong thing all this time? *Taking refuge in oneself is then identified with taking refuge in the dharma, so self, i.e., buddha nature = dharma.* Note the singularity of this formula—taking refuge in the Buddha and the sangha are not mentioned. Some scholars observe that there appear to be references to a unitary refuge formula in which one takes refuge in the dharma only, which is consistent with this advice and similar advice expressed in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta.[335] The threefold formula seems to be a later innovation, as Buddhism becomes more focused on the deification of the Buddha and the sangha is establishing its hegemony.[336] In Tibet, the Lama was added to the Three Jewels, but also identified with them.

WHAT ARE THE "ANCESTRAL HAUNTS"?

By remaining in the forest, according to my interpretation of "ancestral haunts," the Buddha says that the quality of life, beauty, happiness, wealth, and power will all increase. Each of these attainments seems to be associated with a specific practice or set of

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[335] D 16.2.26.

[336] See Rhys Davids, *Minor Anthologies,* Part 1, pp. xxvi, xliii ff.

related practices. Presumably, then, these are the practices in which a forest-dwelling monastic engages in order to produce the fruits described in the sutta. Specifically, **quality of life** is attained by a set of four related practices called the Four Roads to Power. **Beauty** is attained by Right Conduct. **Happiness** is attained by the cultivation of dispassion. **Wealth** is attained by the cultivation of compassion. Finally, **Power** is attained by a practice called "the liberation of heart and wisdom." It seems that the Buddha adapted these four goals, since beauty, wealth, and power seem rather ill suited to monastics. Thus, the Buddha asks what these goals *mean for a monastic.*

THE FOUR ROADS TO POWER

In the Mahaparinibbana Sutta[337] the Buddha comments to Ananda that, had Ananda asked him to do so, the Buddha could overcome his illness by an effort of will and live out his full human lifespan of about one hundred years.[338] Nevertheless, the technique by which this may be accomplished is called the Road to Power (a.k.a. the Four Roads to Power), which is also described in sutta 18. This is broken down into four specific concentration exercises: (1) concentration of **intention,** (2) concentration of **energy,** (3) concentration of **consciousness,** and (4) concentration of **investigation.** According to the text, each exercise is accompanied by an effort of **will.**

Beauty, wealth, and power seem to be strange goals for a monastic. The Four Roads to Power appear to be an adaptation of an originally non-Buddhist practice. Thus, the Buddha reinterprets beauty as right conduct, which is perfected by the rules of training. Happiness is interpreted as dispassion, which is perfected by the practice of the Four Meditative attainments.

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[337] D 16.

[338] An older translation is that the Buddha indicates that he might live until the end of the age. The Buddha may also have been identifying his own death (*parinibbana*) with the advent of a new age of humanity.

Wealth is another of those surprising goals, which is reinterpreted by the Buddha as compassion, the familiar metta meditation, by which the monastic suffuses the whole world with feelings of love.

Finally, the Buddha identifies power with the destruction of the corruptions or taints, consisting of craving for sensual pleasures, craving for existence, and ignorance, to which attachment to views is added in the commentaries. The literal meaning of the word translated as 'corruptions,' *asava,* is 'discharge from a sore.' This power is the corruptionless liberation of heart by wisdom. Heart in Pali is *citta,* which literally means heart/mind. Heart also suggests calming meditation; wisdom, insight meditation, or wisdom based on a serene heart.

Interestingly, the discussion of the Road to Power, culminating in power (perhaps "empowerment" is better) and the liberation of the heart by wisdom that is attained by realization, segues into a discussion of the power of Mara. The commonality is clearly *power,* which identifies this practice as proto-tantric in character. Power (*bala*) in itself is neither enlightened nor unenlightened, both of which are ultimately dualistic concepts. The energy of enlightenment immediately posits the energy of unenlightenment and vice versa.

Perhaps this is as good a place as any to mention that, while this and other meditative practices are alluded to in the Pali Canon, the actual methods are only described in the briefest possible way. Clearly, the techniques must be far more detailed, so the texts must be supplemented by oral instructions that were given by the Buddha or his followers directly to the monastics in person. This shows that the Pali Canon is not complete, but is merely a compilation of outer teachings that must be elaborated in detail when the actual practices are taught to the monastics. Alternatively, the absence of details might also imply that the redactors of the Pali Canon themselves were beginning to forget them, much as the Theravadins

forgot the techniques of meditation by the nineteenth century.[339] Unfortunately, this aspect of the oral tradition is largely lost to us over the course of time. The Road to Power is especially interesting because it shows that at least some Buddhist meditations are not directed toward the attainment of enlightenment, but are directly concerned with the acquisition of the so-called iddhi, psychic attainments or even magical powers. This is why the later traditions have so much of value to contribute because they represent the fruits and insights of actual practice instead of a faded collective memory.

MERIT

The Buddha concludes with the statement that merit increases with the accumulation of wholesome states. The phrase translated as 'wholesome' is *upaya kausalya,* which literally translated means something closer to 'effective' than the rather vague connotations of the English word 'wholesome.' Thus, *upaya* means something like 'strategic,' whereas *kausalya* is 'skilful' or even 'capable.' I think we see here another indication of the influence of the mercantile society of the Buddha, his largest constituency, on Buddhist thinking. Just as Buddhism resolves ethics into the ontological fact of the Law of Karma, so does it resolve morality into *that which works*. Buddhist ethics are the ultimate pragmatism. Similarly, Buckminster Fuller declares that a moral or ethical system is simply an empirical fact that developed experientially as the optimum or most efficient human response to the environment. In the case of Buddhism, ethics are embedded in actuality, not as an 'ought,' but as a fundamental ontological fact—the law of cause and effect, which is also a fundamental axiom of science.

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[339] David Chapman discusses this in the context of the so-called Theravada in his article, "Theravada Reinvents Meditation."

Origins

Digha Nikaya 27

Country: Kosala
Locale: mansion of Migara's mother in the East Park, Savatthi
Speakers: Vasettha, Bharadvaja, the Buddha

Savatthi, a.k.a. Shravasti, a prosperous trading centre located on the bank of the Aciravati (now West Rapti) river, and the capital of the ancient kingdom of Kosala, was one of the six largest cites in India at the time of the Buddha, with a population of fifty-seven thousand households. The Buddha spent twenty-four rainy seasons in Savatthi during his lifetime.

Vasettha and Bharadvaja are the two young Brahmans in sutta 13, where they were arguing about right and wrong paths. In this sutta, they are living among the monastics, hoping to become monastics themselves. In the evening, the Buddha comes out of "Migara's mansion," a sort of pleasance, having spent the day there in secluded meditation, and begins walking in the shade. Vasettha, noticing this, suggests to Bharadvaja that they follow the Buddha in the hope of hearing a dharma talk from him.

The Buddha asks Vasettha and Bharadvaja if they get any grief from the other Brahmans for hanging out with the Buddha's monastics. They say the Brahmans accuse them of abandoning the highest, fairest, purest caste who consist of the children of God (Brahma). Instead, they are the base caste of the Buddha's disciples, described as "shaveling petty ascetics, servants, dark fellows born

of Brahma's foot."[340] The Buddhist sangha makes no distinction between the castes, so to the Brahmans the sangha is a mixed-race rabble with whom one should not associate. Therefore, the sangha is an egalitarian organization.

There are several colour references in this sutta, associating the Brahmans with a fairer and therefore better caste of people. This Indian view of race is consistent with the Aryan migration theory, in which fair-skinned Indo-European migrants from the northwest assimilated into a local, darker, aboriginal people. There is no indication in the Pali Canon, however, that the Buddha shares this racial bias, *pace* Peter Masefield.

The Buddha replies that such an attitude shows that the Brahmans forgot their ancient tradition, an oft-repeated assertion of the Buddha. The Buddha has identified himself as restoring the primordial Brahmanic tradition to its original purity and perfection, identified with the ancient Vedic rishis as well as a prehistoric lineage of perfected buddhas. The Buddha points out that Brahman women give birth, just like the women of other castes. Therefore, the statement that Brahmans are "born from the mouth of Brahma" is a myth. As a lie, such an assertion earns much demerit (he says). Here the Buddha reveals his rationalistic side, criticized by the Vedic traditionalists.

The Buddha gives an account of the castes, which he itemizes as warriors (*kshatriyas*), priests (*brahmans*), traders (*vaisyas*), and workers (*shudras*). The Buddha places the noble or warrior caste above the Brahmans. This was their original and proper place in northeast India at that time, which the Buddha very likely identified with the ancient tradition aforesaid, whereas the Brahmans usurped the authority of the kshatriya caste in the west, where they are the dominant group. In the Pali Canon, the Brahmans are generally portrayed as subject to the military rulers, though clearly favoured, as they often fulfilled such roles as governors of towns, which they practically owned.

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[340] D 27.3.

The Buddha points out that all the castes are equally subject to karma, both bad and good. Once again, alcohol is not mentioned in the list of what we otherwise recognize as the precepts of pansil. Both bright and dark qualities—good and bad karma—are scattered indiscriminately among the four castes. Therefore, the claim of the Brahmans to supremacy is disproved by the fact that anyone of any caste who destroys the corruptions that bind them to rebirth may become emancipated through superknowledge and thus become an arhant, who is above all the castes. In the same way as the Shakyans submit to Pasenadi, the king of Kosala, so too does the king submit to the Tathagata.

The Buddha points out that all the members of the sangha, though they come from different births, names, clans, and families, are all ascetics, followers of the Shakyan. This is also how they should refer to themselves if asked (he says). The Pali word is *Sakyaputta,* literally 'sons of the Shakyan clan.' It may also mean 'children of the Shakyans' or even 'children of those who are able,' the literal meaning of Shakya. The Buddha thus elaborates this statement: "I am a true son of Blessed Lord, born of his mouth, born of Dhamma, created by Dhamma, an heir of Dhamma,"[341] thus appropriating to himself and the dharma the role of Brahma. One often reads in the literature that the English term "Buddhist" does not correspond to a word that the Buddha used, but Buddhist, literally 'one concerned with the Buddha,' is not that far different in meaning from *Sakyaputta,* so we may say that Buddhists are "Shakyaists."

The Buddha says that they may refer to themselves in this way because the Body of Dharma (*dhammakaya*) "designates" the Tathagata. This is a rare explication in the Pali Canon of the meaning of *tathagata*, the mysterious epithet that means something like 'he who has travelled the path.' *Dhammakaya,* also translated 'truth body' or 'reality body,' is one of the three bodies of the Buddha in Mahayana Buddhism, representing the highest, unmanifested, inconceivable aspect of a Buddha. The Buddha glosses this phrase as

[341] D 27.9.

'the Body of Brahma,' 'Become Dhamma,' or 'Become Brahma,' meaning that the Buddha, as the Tathagata, has realized the highest reality. The other two aspects are the bliss body (*sambhogakaya*) and the emanation body (*nirmanakaya*) (cf. the Formless, Form, and Sensual worlds of the *arupaloka, rupaloka,* and *kamaloka*). The *dhammakaya* is the most inscrutable, immortal, and timeless essence of a tathagata.

The Buddha describes the contraction of the universe, when most beings are reborn in the Abhassara Brahma world, corresponding to the second meditative attainment. The Abhassara realm refers to the radiant devas, who are our own origin as people prior to being degraded to the level of rebirth on the earth plane. This is the realm next above the Brahma world. The Buddha describes the residents of this world as "mind-made, feeding on delight, self-luminous, moving through the air, glorious,"[342] and long-lived. After a very long time the universe begins to expand again, much as described by the so-called "big bang" theory of modern physics. During the period of this expansion, most of the beings from the Abhassara realm are reborn in this world. Here they abide in the same fashion, mind-made, feeding on delight, self-luminous, moving through the air, glorious. This description is reminiscent of Plato's bisexual luminous spheres that, he says, are the original nature of people, perhaps implying a primordial, pre-hominid occupation of the earth by these luminous aerial beings.

The Buddha tells Vasettha a myth about the origin of the world and life. The earth was originally entirely covered by water, and everything was blinding darkness. There were no sun, moon, stars, night, days, seasons, or gender. Interestingly, scientists believe that the earth was almost entirely covered by water about 2.5 billion years ago. The only life on Earth was sexless algae and bacteria. After a very long period, a skin formed on the surface of the water. The cause of the one world ocean was the deep mantle of the earth,

[342] D 27.10.

which was 200 degrees hotter than it is now. As it cooled, the continental crust formed.

> During the water world era, any oxygen produced by photosynthesising bacteria would have been quickly used up through reactions with decaying organic matter in the oceans.
>
> When the newly emerged land eroded, it produced sediment that washed into the oceans and buried the organic matter, preventing further reactions with oxygen, the scientists believe. As a result, oxygen built up in the atmosphere and enabled oxygen-breathing life to evolve and flourish.
>
> The eroded sediment would also have fertilised the oceans with phosphorous, an important nutrient for living things.[343]

The Pali Canon calls this phosphorus "skin" *rasa-pathavi* (lit. 'earth-sap'). Interestingly, in view of the subsequent reference to luminance, phosphorus emits a faint glow when exposed to oxygen. It is also an essential element of the human genetic material, DNA and RNA.

Until this time people were still like devas, even though they inhabited our universe. One of these devas tasted the earth-sap, and discovered that it was very sweet. This was the origin of **craving.** As a result, their self-luminance disappeared, the sun and the moon revealed themselves, and nights, days, and seasons all appeared, restarting the evolution of the universe.

Over a very long period, the devas continued to feast on the earth-sap and as they did so their bodies became coarser and their appearance began to acquire individual differences. Beauty and ugliness arose, leading to pride, which in turn led to the disappearance of the earth-sap. Perhaps as the beings became more material the more refined earth-sap became intangible to them, or they required denser food. In place of the earth-sap, a mushroom-like fungus appeared. So the devas started to feast on the fungus instead of

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[343] "Early Earth 'Was Covered in Water,'" *Metro News* (Dec. 31, 2008).

the earth-sap, and their bodies continued to coarsen. The process continued over eons. Each time the existing food disappeared, and a new one appeared. Creepers, bamboo, and rice followed the fungus.

When rice became the main food, female and male sex organs appeared and people began to copulate. This is really the point at which people as we know them appear. The concepts of property and territoriality arose.[344] People began to exploit the wild rice and damage the environment. As a result, the rice fields were divided with boundaries. Because of dividing the rice fields up into plots, people began to steal each other's property, and all kinds of civil strife arose, which in turn required repressive measures. Because of this civil strife, the people appointed someone to keep order in exchange for a share of the rice. This person was called the Mahasammata—literally 'great appointee,' the precursor of the kshatriya caste. The premise here is that the primordial state of humanity postulated by the Buddha is the direct democracy of the people—the original non-self-contradictory state. The kshatriya caste and the title of raja ('king') also appear, which together constitute the kshatriya, the "first" or original caste.

This protohistorical account of the progressive devolution of beings culminating in the appearance of property, territoriality, government, civil order and disorder, etc. is a specialized application of the interdependent origination doctrine.

The Buddha identifies the origin of each of the castes as a process of continuous degeneration: the Brahmans in ethical judgment, meditation, and scholarship; the merchant or trader class in sensuality and the settled householder life; and the artisans or workers in hunting and gathering. Finally, the ascetics appear out of all the castes in response to fundamental dissatisfaction. This is presented as a kind of historical development. The castes reap the

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[344] Interestingly, the Buddha identifies the root of territoriality with the shame of sex.

consequences of bad and good karma alike, but all can attain emancipation. Therefore, the ascetics are above the castes.

The Buddhist view of the tendency to degeneration is in striking contrast to the Western evolutionary bias, which tends to see the arrow of time progressing toward better and more successful states. The Buddhist view is more akin to the scientific perspective that time is generally entropic, but with negentropic modes or phases. However, properly speaking, Buddhism sees time as cyclical, forever alternating between periods of devolution and evolution, on both human and cosmological scales, without purpose or goal.

Finally, the Buddha quotes the Brahma Sanat Kumara. He is one of the four mind-born sons of Brahma: "The Khattiya's best among those who value clan, / He with knowledge and conduct is best of gods and men."[345] The Buddha affirms that the sangha stands in relation to the spiritual life as the kshatriyas stand in relation to society. It is clear, however, that the Buddha himself is not one of those who value clan, so he is not *actually* affirming the supremacy of any caste.

[345] D 27.31.

Serene Confidence

Digha Nikaya 28

Country: Magadha
Locale: Pavarika's mango grove in Nalanda
Speakers: Sariputta, the Buddha, Udayi

In the Mahaparinibbana Sutta,[346] the Buddha has a conversation with Sariputta at Pavarika's mango grove in Nalanda. Sariputta declares that there never has been and never will be an ascetic or Brahman more enlightened than the Buddha. The Buddha chastises Sariputta, asking him how he knows this, but Sariputta replies that he knows the 'drift' of the dharma (*dhammanvaya,* lit. 'in accordance with the dharma'). Sariputta refers specifically to the five fetters or hindrances (sensory desire, anger, sloth-torpor, restlessness-worry, and doubt), the Four Foundations of Awareness (awareness of the body, feelings or sensations, mind or consciousness, and mental phenomena or mind objects), and the Seven Factors of Enlightenment (awareness, investigation, energy, joy or rapture, relaxation or tranquility, concentration, and equanimity). This conversation is repeated in the first two sections of this sutta, which places it in the last year of the Buddha's life.

Sariputta says that he has "serene confidence" in the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha, which Walshe identifies with the "unwavering confidence" referred to in sutta 16 in connection with the Mirror of Dharma, based on the Buddha's exposition of dharma, "contrasting the dark with the light." The Buddha implies that the

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[346] D 16.

attainment of this confidence *guarantees* no more lower rebirths and establishes one as a stream entrant, whereby one attains nirvana within seven rebirths. Thus, this faith or confidence is formally equivalent to Right View ("insight") or Wisdom, the first step of the Noble Eightfold Path. *Perfect* confidence is not easy to attain, and must be *actual* to be effective—this is not a matter of assenting intellectually to a few fundamental doctrines in a rote way and participating in a Refuge ceremony. Buddhist confidence is neither the "faith for faith's sake" of Christianity, nor is it a merely intellectual assent or even an intellectual conviction, but rather *absolute experiential certainty* born of reasonable inquiry and analysis that has become internalized to the point of automaticity—a true 'change of view' or transformation of state, the literal meaning of *metanoia,* commonly mistranslated as 'repentance.' View (*ditthi,* lit. 'eyesight' or 'vision'), whether right or wrong, is simply the way one knows the world. Apparently, Sariputta had this experience of awakening immediately after hearing the Buddha speak for the first time.

The rest of the sutta expands Sariputta's reply to the Buddha, explaining the "drift of the dhamma." In particular, Sariputta praises the Buddha's exposition of the thirty-seven wholesome factors; the six sense spheres; the four modes of rebirth; the four ways of telling thoughts (culminating in actual telepathy); the four ways of attaining vision; the seven designations of individuals; the exertions, a.k.a. the Seven Factors of Enlightenment; the four modes of progress; the modes of proper conduct in speech; the modes of proper ethical conduct; four modes of receptivity to instruction; knowing the four types of liberation of others; the three theories of eternalism; remembering past lives; knowing the two ways of death and rebirth of beings; and two kinds of supernormal powers. It is the first such comprehensive summary in the Digha Nikaya, which we see again in suttas 33 and 34.

After completing his enumeration, Sariputta affirms that the Buddha has accomplished whatever a person can achieve by effort, exertion, and endurance, implicitly affirming that the Buddha is a person. This indicates an earlier phase of scriptural development, when the Buddha is still regarded as a person. He follows the

Middle Path, neither indulging the senses nor engaging in pointless self-torture. During life, he enjoys the trans-sensory happiness of abiding in the four meditative attainments.

The Buddha affirms that he has reached the apex of human development, but denies that he is alone. Rather, he affirms the past and the future existence of buddhas, equal to himself in every way, but denies that any other buddha exists now for "'it cannot be that in the one and the same world system two Arahant supreme Buddhas should arise simultaneously.' No such situation can exist."[347] Once again, we see that it is impossible for an arhant to be a buddha. A similar sentiment is expressed in sutta 9. The question arises of what a "world system" refers to. The word is *lokadhatuya,* composed of *loka* + *dhatu,* literally 'space element.' According to PED, it refers to a "constituent or unit of the universe." It is a synonym for *cakkavala,* a 'circle' or 'sphere,' with special reference to the circumference of the earth. In modern terms, it seems to allude to a planet or perhaps to the spherical character of the expanding universe, or even the curvature of space itself.

Udayi, who we have not heard from up to this point, marvels at the humility of the Buddha in view of his obvious greatness. The Buddha exhorts Sariputta to teach this sutta to others, to allay any doubts or questions they might have about the dharma.

The thirty-seven wholesome factors include the Four Foundations of Awareness, the Four Right Efforts, the Four Roads to Power, the Five Spiritual Faculties, the Five Mental Powers, the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, and the Noble Eightfold Path. Altogether, these make up the thirty-seven requisites of enlightenment. Similarly, Mahayana has the thirty-seven practices of a bodhisattva.[348]

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347 D 28.19.

348 "Another hypothesis...is that the Buddha wanted the number of factors to total 37 because the number had symbolic meaning. In ancient times, before the development of the decimal system, multiplication tables were arranged in hexagonal patterns. The complete table used to calculate the ratios used in tuning musical instruments to reciprocal scales—scales that played the same notes going up as going down—had one member in the middle surrounded by three hexagonal

Sariputta says that "by these a monk, through the destruction of the corruptions, can in this very life, by his own superknowledge, realise and attain the corruption-free liberation of heart and liberation by wisdom, and abide therein."[349]

Ways of teaching dharma

Item	Number	Reference(s) (suttas 1 to 28)
Wholesome factors	37	16.3.50
— *Four foundations of awareness*	4	22
—*Four right efforts*	4	22.21
—*Four roads to power*	4	16.3.3, 18.22, 26.28
—*Five spiritual faculties*	5	16.3.51
—*Five mental powers*	5	16.3.51
—*Seven factors of enlightenment*	7	22.16
—*Noble Eightfold Path*	8	16.5.27, 19.61, 22.21
Sense spheres	6	22.15
Modes of rebirth	4	28.5
Telepathy	4	11.3
Attainment of vision	4	28.7
Designations of individuals	7	28.8
Exertions (factors of enlightenment)	7	22.16
Modes of progress	4	28.10
Proper conduct in speech	NA	28.11
Proper ethical conduct	NA	28.12
Modes of receptivity to instruction	4	28.13
Knowledge of liberation of others	4	28.14
Theories of eternalism	3	1.1.30ff.

rings containing, in ascending order, six, twelve, and eighteen members, giving a total of 37 members. The table of whole-number ratios that formed the basis for trigonometry, and thus for the study of astronomy, contained 37 members. Thus, the number 37 carried connotations of basic completeness. This principle is at work in Plato's Laws, where the ideal city has 37 guardians, and it may also be at work here." (Thanissaro, "Wings to Awakening, Part II: The Seven Sets."). See also Zangpo's "Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva."

[349] D 28.3.

Remembering past lives	NA	1.1.31ff., 2.93, 24.2.18f., 12.11, 28.1, 23.24, 27.8
Knowledge of death and birth of beings	2	28.17
Supernormal powers	2	2.87, 11.5, 17.1.18, 28.18

Most of the doctrines that Sariputta mentions appear in previous suttas, especially suttas 16 (Mahaparinibbana Sutta) and 22 (Mahasatipatthana Sutta). Nine items appear to be first mentioned in sutta 28:

- Modes of rebirth (¶5);
- Attainment of vision (¶7);
- Designations of individuals (¶8);
- Modes of progress (¶10);
- Proper conduct in speech (¶11);
- Proper ethical conduct (¶12);
- Modes of receptivity to instruction (¶13);
- Knowledge of liberation of others (¶14); and
- Knowledge of death and birth of beings (¶17).

I will limit myself to a straightforward exposition of these nine items, in the order in which they appear in the sutta.

MODES OF REBIRTH

Sariputta identifies four modes of rebirth: (1) one descends into the mother's womb unknowing, stays there unknowing, and leaves it unknowing; (2) one enters the womb knowing, stays there unknowing, and leaves it unknowing; (3) one enters the womb knowing, stays there knowing, and leaves it unknowing; (4) one enters the womb knowing, stays there knowing, and leaves it knowing. The most interesting part of this doctrine is the premise: "one descends into the mother's womb." This implies two things: first, a being that descends into the womb (called the *gandhabba* in the Pali suttas), and a descent into the womb that a being undertakes, implying that the intrinsic non-embodied state of this "one" is "higher" or

superior to the enwombed state. The four modes of rebirth are simply all logically possible combinations of knowing and unknowing. It seems to be meant as an explanation of why people are ignorant of their past lives. According to this view, some beings lose this memory at the moment of conception, during gestation, or at birth, but others—presumably more advanced spiritually—keep their memories all the way through, the latter explaining the phenomenon of post-parturition past-life recall, which has been documented at some length by Dr. Ian Stevenson and others. The reference to "knowing in the womb" is intriguing in the light of research by Stanislav Grof and others into intrauterine memory, which commonly appears during psychedelic experiences. Walshe relates these to four different types of being, respectively: ordinary people; the eighty "great elders";[350] the two chief disciples of a buddha, *pratyekabuddhas,* and bodhisattvas; and bodhisattvas in their final birth, based on the commentary.

ATTAINMENT OF VISION

The four visionary attainments are induced by means of "ardour, endeavour, application, vigilance and due attention," by which one reaches four stages of *concentrated meditation*: one perceives (1) the body as full of manifold impurities, (2) the bones covered with skin, flesh, and blood, (3) the *unbroken stream of human consciousness,* as established both in this world and the next, (4) the *unbroken stream of human consciousness* not established either in this world or the next.

The most interesting thing about this description is the reference to the "unbroken stream of human consciousness"[351] in its two states: one *established* in both this world and the next, and one *not established* in either. The former presumably refers to the stream of consciousness with karmic residue resulting in rebirth, and the

[350] These arhants passed down the teachings of the Buddha, such as Mahakassapa and others.

[351] D 28.7.

latter to the unbroken stream not subject to rebirth. The latter implies in turn the Deathless state. The Pali term is *vinnana-sota* (lit. 'current of sentience'), which is equivalent to the commentarial term, *bhavanga* (lit. 'subconsciousness'). These correspond to the Mahayana term, *santana* (lit. 'moment to moment continuum').

DESIGNATIONS OF INDIVIDUALS

The designation of individuals refers to a classification of seven types of aspirants according to how they were liberated, which in turn tells us that there are different ways of being liberated:

1. **Both ways liberated:** one who "contacts" the immaterial meditative attainments (the fifth through eighth jhanas) with the body and completely destroys the taints through wisdom or insight;
2. **Wisdom liberated:** one destroys the taints through wisdom only;
3. **The body witness:** one who "contacts" the immaterial meditative attainments with the body and destroys some of the taints through wisdom;
4. **The vision attainer ("attained to view"):** one who destroys some of the taints through wisdom, including by means of the dharma of the Tathagata;
5. **The faith liberated:** one who destroys some of the taints through wisdom, and has faith in the Tathagata;
6. **The dharma follower:** one who gains a "reflective acceptance" of the dharma through wisdom, together with the five faculties (faith, energy, awareness, concentration, wisdom); and
7. **The faith follower:** One who has "sufficient" faith in the Tathagata together with the five faculties.[352]

[352] The "seven kinds of persons" are merely itemized in the Digha Nikaya. This explanation is based on the Kitagiri Sutta (M 70.14–21). Only the first two types are

MODES OF PROGRESS

Sariputta distinguishes four modes of practice or progress: (1) painful and slow, (2) painful and quick (3) pleasant and slow, and (4) pleasant and quick. Painfulness is the result of lust, hatred, and delusion, as noted in the Anguttara Nikaya, whereas the faculties of confidence, energy, awareness, concentration, and wisdom generate the "immediacy condition for the destruction of the taints,"[353] which arise feebly or quickly. Only the fourth mode is regarded as optimal due to the combination of dispassion and the pre-eminence of the five faculties.

RIGHT SPEECH

Sariputta says that the Buddha teaches that one should avoid lying, divisive (*vebhutiyam*) and sneeringly triumphant speech (*sarambhajam jayapekkho*), and instead use wise and "seasonable" words to be treasured. Clearly, this is simply a slight elaboration of the fourth precept.

RIGHT CONDUCT

Sariputta says that the Buddha teaches that one should behave ethically, including on the negative side, avoiding deceit, patter, insinuation, belittling, always being on the make for further gains, and not hankering after sense pleasures. On the positive side, one should be truthful, faithful, restrained, abstemious, peacemaking, watchful, active, strenuous in effort, meditative, *mindful* (repeated twice), fitting in conversation, steady-going (*gatima*), resolute (*dhitima*), sensible (*mutima*), and prudent. These generalized ethical teachings are common to all religions. In Buddhism, they are marginally important, as we discussed in connection with sutta 1 and again in connection with the Threefold Division of the Noble

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completely liberated and, therefore, full arhants. Note the emphasis on the immaterial meditative attainments.

353 A 162.2.

Eightfold Path attributed to Dhammadina, the so-called Higher Training.

MODES OF RECEPTIVITY TO INSTRUCTION

Sariputta identifies four modes of receptivity to instruction, by which he simply means the four grades of attainment: stream entrant, once-returner, non-returner, and arhant. A stream entrant is no longer subject to rebirth in a subhuman world, and attains this grade by destroying the three fetters of self-identity, clinging to rites and rituals, and destructive doubt. A once-returner reduces, but does not eliminate, greed, hatred, and delusion. A non-returner destroys the five lower fetters of sensual lust, anger, conceit, attachment to views, and doubt and is reborn as a deva, from which state they attain emancipation. Finally, the arhant destroys all the corruptions—all the foregoing, plus lust for rebirth in form or formless realms, conceit, and restlessness-worry, whereby they attain the deliverance of mind through wisdom that is uncorrupted, understood, and realized by transcendent realization (*abhinna*; Walshe's 'superknowledge').

KNOWLEDGE OF LIBERATION OF OTHERS

This is the ability of a buddha to perceive the attainment of others. Although it looks like a mode of telepathy, the reference to 'skilled observation' (*paccattam yoniso manasikara*) suggests rather that it is a mode of vastly heightened cognition. Thus, the marks of karma are apparent to a buddha, in the same way that the thirty-two marks of a great man were apparent to the Brahmans when the Buddha was born. There are also references to brightness of complexion indicating either attainment or the proximity of death. This indicates a fundamental belief that the physical form subtly but unmistakably manifests the psychic condition that underlies it. However, as with past lives, the signs of attainment are so subtle and refined that only a buddha can perceive them.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE DEATH AND REBIRTH OF BEINGS

This last item posits a similar perceptive ability with respect to the karma of others, including the karmic destinations of beings. However, whereas the former item clearly refers to a higher *cognitive* process, i.e., *skilled observation,* though of incredibly subtle character, the death and rebirth of beings is perceived because of *intense mental concentration.* Because of this concentration, the Divine Eye, which surpasses human vision, is "purified." This primordial or archetypal motif of the Divine Eye, sometimes identified (e.g., by Descartes) with the pineal gland and the "seat of the soul," is found in all the world's wisdom traditions. What the Buddha perceives is the karmic fate resulting from wrong and right view. Wrong View is the result, says Sariputta, of misconduct of body, speech, or thought, or disparaging 'Noble Ones' (*ariyas*) including (presumably) arhants, buddhas, *pratyekabuddhas,* and bodhisattvas. Right View is the first step in the Noble Eightfold Path, referring to Wisdom, the highest principle in the Threefold Division of the Noble Eightfold Path. Thus, ignorance, the opposite of Wisdom, is the motive force of karma and rebirth (*samsara*). Moreover, the path begins with the highest attainment—a radical distinction mysterious in its essence.

The Inspiring Discourse

Digha Nikaya 29

Country: Shakya
Locale: School building in the mango grove belonging to the Vedhanna family, near Samagama
Speakers: Cunda, Ananda, the Buddha, Upavana

This sutta takes place when the Buddha is staying in the Shakyan territory, among his own people, toward the end of his life but prior to the Kosalan genocide of the Shakyans (Schumann says that this genocide occurred one or two years before the Buddha's passing).[354] The Buddha says, "Now I am an aged teacher of long standing, who went forth a long time ago, and my life is coming to its close."[355] The sutta further states, "At that time the Nigantha Nataputta had just died at Pava,"[356] a Jain stronghold in the state of Malla, to the south of Shakya. The Buddha also travelled through Pava shortly before his passing. Here he ate the famous meal of "pig's delight" offered to him by Cunda the blacksmith. Pava was located near present day Fazilnagar, in Kushinagar district of the state of Uttar Pradesh.

Nigantha Nataputta is the name given in the Pali Canon to Vardhamana Mahavira, the twenty-fourth and last *Tirthankara*

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354 Schumann, *Historical Buddha,* p. 243.
355 D 29.14.
356 D 29.1.

('pathfinder') of Jainism, referred to hereinafter as Mahavira. The historical origin of Jainism is obscure, but probably goes back to the eighth and ninth centuries BCE. Walshe is certainly in error when he ascribes the years 568–540 BCE to Mahavira, which would make Mahavira only 28 at his death. According to tradition, Mahavira left home at the age of 30, practised meditation and asceticism for twelve and a half years before attaining enlightenment, and died at the age of 72. The Jains themselves believe he was born in 599 BCE, but scholars reject this date as too early, much as they reject the Theravada date for the birth of the Buddha in 624 BCE. Walshe notes that Mahavira is generally believed to have died after the Buddha, but this sutta clearly states that he died shortly before. The *Ancient History Encyclopedia*[357] states that the accepted date of Mahavira's death is about 467 BCE, and places the Buddha's birth between 490 and 450 BCE, which would put the Buddha's passing between 410 and 370—this being the increasingly prevalent view.[358] Other Jain sources revise the death of Mahavira as 474 to 467 BCE. Clearly, the two dates are mutually incompatible, since sutta 2 represents Mahavira as being alive about the time that King Ajatasattu and others consulted the Buddha. The suttas of the Pali Canon consistently present the Buddha and Mahavira as contemporaries who were known to each other and whose lives overlapped, though they never met. Thus, we must place Mahavira's birth between 485 and 445 BCE approximately.

A.K. Narain, in his review of *The Dating of the Historical Buddha,* says,

> The Jain tradition gives a date of 155 years after the death of Mahavira for the coronation of Candragupta [340–298 BCE, founder of the Maurya Empire], which we can date c. 320 B.C. We have a firm connection between Sthulabhadra [297–198 BCE, Jain disciple of Acharya Bhadrabahu] and Candragupta's immediate predecessor Nanda

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357 S.v. *Vardhamana.*

358 "Dates of the Buddha."

> [400–329 BCE, first king of the Nanda dynasty], and we have a date of 170 years after the death of Mahavira for the death of Sthulabhadra's predecessor, the sixth Jain patriarch Bhadrababu. Thus, he died about fifteen years after Candragupta's coronation. By taking an average figure of 15 years for each of the six patriarchs, we can date the death of Mahavira 75 years before the coronation of Candragupta, i.e. c. 395 B.C.... We shall probably not be far out if we assume that both Mahavira the Jina and Gotama the Buddha died within the period of ten years either side of 400 B.C. (pp. 311f.)

After Mahavira's death, the sutta presents the Jain order as being riven by internal dissension. Just after the rainy season, in October-November, the novice Cunda comes to Samagama to see Ananda and tells him about this, whereupon Ananda and Cunda tell the Buddha of Mahavira's death. The Buddha's response is that Mahavira is unenlightened and his doctrine and discipline ill proclaimed, unedifyingly displayed, and ineffectual in calming the passions because it is impossible to live by it. As a result, the practitioner gains much demerit. Possibly the Buddha is referring to the Jain emphasis on abstinence from all actions based on the doctrine that action, and not intention, is the cause of karma—the classical Indian view. Such a view is impossible to carry out in practice, leading to all sorts of excesses and perversions of the type the Buddha experienced during his ascetic period.

The Buddha then compares himself and his sangha to Mahavira and his sangha, to the detriment of the latter. The Buddha discusses the merit or demerit of teachers, doctrines, and disciples in terms of the enlightenment or non-enlightenment of the teacher, the doctrine and the discipline being well or ill proclaimed, and the practice or non-practice by the disciple, and the praiseworthiness or blame and the merit or demerit of these various factors. Next, he discusses the sadness or non-sadness arising from the death of the teacher in these various circumstances as a function of the disciples' understanding of the dharma and the discipline. Finally, he discusses the perfection or imperfection of the practice of the holy life as a function of the seniority of teachers. These last two points

pertain specifically to the sangha. Where the teacher is enlightened, the doctrine and the discipline are well proclaimed and well understood, the disciples are both able to practise and do practise, and senior teachers continue to perpetuate the dharma and the discipline indefinitely based on correct understanding is the ideal concatenation of circumstances.

The Buddha refers to his second meditation teacher from long ago, Uddaka Ramaputta, the son (or disciple) of Rama, who taught Gotama how to experience the highest samsaric plane of neither perception nor non-perception. Some authorities say Uddaka was a Brahman, whereas others say he was a Jain. His inclusion here suggests the latter. He mentions a saying of Uddaka, "he sees, but does not see,"[359] together with a rather obscure metaphor in which he compares the dharma to a razor. Just as when one turns the razor on its edge, it disappears (because the edge is so thin), so is the dharma pure and complete, there being nothing to add to or subtract from it. The razor also cuts like a vajra.

The Buddha tells Cunda that the sangha should regularly rehearse the teachings attained by the Buddha's superknowledge or transcendent realization, "setting meaning beside meaning, and expression beside expression, without dissension, in order that this holy life may continue and be established for a long time for the profit and happiness of the many out of compassion for the world and for the benefit, profit and happiness of devas and humans."[360]

The Buddha reaffirms his role, not merely as the teacher of humans, but as the teacher of devas. Then the Buddha summarizes the thirty-seven factors of enlightenment; "these are the things that you should recite together."[361] The Buddha then recites the method by which the continuing consensus of the assembly may be maintained:

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[359] D 29.16.
[360] D 29.17.
[361] Ibid.

> If a fellow in the holy life quotes Dhamma in the assembly, and if you think he has either misunderstood the sense or expressed it wrongly, you should neither applaud nor reject it, but should say to him, 'Friend, if you mean such and such, you should put it either like this or like that: which is the more appropriate?' or: 'If you say such and such, you mean either this or that: which is the more appropriate?' If he replies: 'This meaning is better expressed like this than like that,' or: 'The sense of this expression is this rather than that,' then his words should be neither rejected nor disparaged, but you should explain to him carefully the correct meaning and expression. (18)

In other words, rational discussion devoid of emotional bias pursued to the point of consensus is the proper method of dharma exegesis. This is the basis of the Buddhist commentarial dialectic, in which introductory quotation alternates with interpretation, thus grounding new insights in the tradition of the *Buddhavacana.* Unfortunately, this method was only viable for about 116 years after the *parinibbana,* at which time, about 279 BCE,[362] the sangha split into two competing factions, the majority Mahasamghikas, who developed into the Mahayana, and the minority Sthaviras, who eventually developed into the so-called Theravada sect among others. The fact that the Buddha's thousand-year sangha broke down so soon after the Buddha's passing suggests that the sangha was torn by doctrinal strife from early on, which is hinted at in the canonical account of the first two Buddhist councils (i.e., the debate over how strictly the rules of the Vinaya were to be kept, the apparent conflict between the followers of Mahakassapa and the followers of Ananda, the misogynistic attitude to women and female monastics, and the debate associated with Mahadeva over whether the insight of the arhants was infallible) and even before (e.g., the revolt of the Buddha's cousin, Devadatta, who tried to establish his own sangha, and the Buddha's apparent dissatisfaction with the sangha at the end of

[362] Nattier and Prebish, "Mahasamghika Origins: The Beginnings of Buddhist Sectarianism."

his life), despite the Buddha's warnings against dogmatism and sectarianism.

The Buddha tells Cunda that he teaches a doctrine for restraining the corruptions in the present and destroying them in future lives. To achieve this, the monastics should observe a way of life in which clothing is only enough to ward off heat and cold, insects, bugs, wind, and sun, and to hide the genitals. Alms food should only be enough to provide adequate nourishment for the body and keep it unimpaired by satisfying the sensation of hunger. Shelter should only be enough to ward off bugs and the weather, and to ensure the enjoyment of seclusion. Medicines and medical treatments should only be enough to cure sickness and maintain health. By the self-indulgent standards of our society, this would be considered a dangerous asceticism, but by the standards of the ascetics of the Buddha's time, this is rank hedonism. The Buddha suffered from this accusation of pleasure seeking and laxness all through his life. The Buddha's response to this is interesting. He does not deny it, which may surprise some religious fundamentalists, who worship mummies in their temples and starve or burn themselves to death—things utterly incompatible with what the Buddha taught. Rather, he says, there are two types of pleasures, ignoble and noble. He identifies four types of "ignoble" pleasure, "low, vulgar, worldly, …and not conducive to welfare."[363] These are pleasure in killing, in stealing, in lying, and in sensuality. The Buddha calls these "the four kinds of life devoted to pleasure."[364] One recognizes this list as the first Four Precepts of Pansil, a.k.a. the Fourfold Restraint. Alcohol is not included. Therefore, this is an early teaching. The Buddha says that these forms of pleasure seeking are not conducive to enlightenment and are not recommended by him.

There are, however, four types of pleasure that the Buddha *does* recommend strongly and *are* conducive to enlightenment. These are the four meditative attainments. This recognition that the

[363] D 29.23.
[364] D 29.23.

jhanas are themselves pleasurable is a distinguishing characteristic of the *Buddhadharma*, relating ultimately to the Buddha's realization after rejecting asceticism and nourishing himself back to health that pleasure may be wholesome or unwholesome, and that pleasure in and of itself is not necessarily something to be rejected, beginning with his spontaneous childhood experience of meditation under the rose apple tree. I will briefly recap the characteristics of each one as explained in this sutta:

The four meditative attainments

Jhana	Immediate cause	Mental state	Feeling state
1	Dispassion	Thinking and pondering	Filled with delight and happiness
2	Concentration ("oneness of mind")	Subsiding of thinking and pondering; inner tranquility	Filled with delight and happiness
3	Fading of delight	Imperturbable, mindful, and clearly aware	Joy of equanimity and awareness
4	Giving up pleasure and pain	Disappearance of former gladness and sadness, purified by equanimity and awareness	Beyond pleasure and pain

"These are the four kinds of life devoted to pleasure which are entirely conducive to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to tranquility, to realisation, to enlightenment, to Nibbana. So if wanderers from other sects should say that the followers of the Shakyan are addicted to these four forms of pleasure-seeking, they should be told: 'Yes,' for they would be speaking correctly about you, they would not be slandering you with false or untrue statements."[365]

The Buddha says that the four meditative attainments have four fruits or results, referring to the four stages of attainment: stream

[365] D 29.24.

entry, once returning, non-returning, and arhantship. These grades are attained by the destruction of the corruptions: identity view; doubt; attachment to rules and rituals; sensual desire; anger; craving for existence, both gross and subtle; conceit; restlessness-worry; and ignorance. These doctrines, he says, are as deeply rooted and immovable as the heartwood or iron post buried in the earth in the middle of the threshold gate of a city, recalling both the Middle Way and the Buddha's comparison of the dharma to an abandoned and long forgotten city in the midst of an ancient and trackless forest.

An arhant has destroyed the corruptions, completely destroyed the fetter of becoming (rebirth), and liberated themselves by supreme insight. This last point became a cause of disagreement during or sometime after the Second Buddhist Council.[366]

According to the sutta, an arhant is incapable of nine things:

1. Killing;
2. Stealing;
3. Sex;
4. Lying;
5. Hoarding possessions;
6. Attachment;
7. Hatred;
8. Folly; and
9. Fear.

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[366] The instigator was one Mahadeva, who questions the infallibility of arhants. According to the Theravadins, this occurred about 135 years after the *parinibbana*. The dating is contested but the Five Points of Mahadeva, whoever he was and whenever he lived, clearly question this point. The schools that rejected the absolute infallibility of arhants (see "The Early Buddhist Schools," chap. 2 of my *Dharma Talks*) include the Sarvastivada and Kasyapiya, both derived from the conservative Sthavira, the same school from which the so-called Theravada claims descent, and the Mahasamghika, Ekavyavaharika, Lokottaravada, Bahusrutiya, Prajnaptivada, and the Caitika, from which the Mahayana ultimately derives.

In addition, the sutta makes a very interesting statement about the Buddhist understanding of the nature of time. The Buddha notes that his critics may say that he possesses boundless knowledge and insight regarding the past, but not regarding the future. Many of the debased arts in sutta 1 are forms of divination and prognostication. I find this more interesting than the sutta's statement that he is able to remember his past lives and knows that he will have no more rebirths. These statements imply a view of time that is indeterminate, which only becomes the dominant view of physics since Einstein. It is not that the Buddha does not know the future, the Buddha says, but rather that the future is intrinsically unknowable because of the non-causal factor of volition or intention (*cetana*).

The Buddha uses *tathagata,* the mysterious name that means something like 'he who went this way,' to refer to himself. In this sutta, he gives several explications of the meaning of this phrase, including:

- The **one who declares** the time, the fact, the advantage, the Dharma, and the discipline;
- Whatever in this world with its devas and maras and brahmas, with its ascetics and Brahmans, its princes and people, is seen by people, heard, sensed, cognized, whatever was ever achieved, sought after or mentally pondered upon—**all that has been fully understood by the Tathagata;**
- Between the night in which the Tathagata gains supreme enlightenment and the night in which he attains the nirvana element without remainder**, whatever he proclaims, says or explains is so and not otherwise;** and
- The Tathagata is the **unvanquished conqueror, the seer and ruler of all.**

The Buddha states that he does not reveal the future post-mortem state of a tathagata, whether he exists or does not exist, not because there is no answer to this question, but because the question is not pragmatic. Instead, he reveals the Four Noble Truths.

Thus, the Buddha distinguishes between theory and practice. This is often interpreted to mean that the Buddha has no view of the nature of reality, no ontology or cosmology, but the entire Pali Canon, as well as reason, stands in refutation of this assertion. Thus, the Buddha says, "those bases of speculation about the beginnings of things…I have explained to you as they should be explained."[367] If we interpret the Pali Canon as a whole and in its entirely, we must conclude that the Buddha taught on two levels: a lower ordination (*pabbajja*, lit. 'renunciation') consisting of practice, for those who have not attained realization, and a higher ordination (*upasampada,* lit. 'elder') consisting of wisdom, for those who have attained realization.[368] This is what we find if we examine the suttas in their totality. Otherwise, theory is just speculation. This is the Buddha's point, not that he *has* no ontology or cosmology.

[367] D 29.34.
[368] Cf. the doctrine of conventional and ultimate truth.

The Marks

Digha Nikaya 30

Country: Kosala
Locale: Jetavana monastery in Anathapindika's Park, Savatthi
Speaker: the Buddha

The thirty-two marks of a great man and the seven treasures of a righteous world ruler appear in sutta 14. Here in sutta 30 we see them again. The marks of a great man are, perhaps paradoxically, observable shortly after birth. If they are all present, they indicate that the infant is destined to be either a righteous world ruler, who governs in accordance with dharma, or a buddha who achieves enlightenment and teaches dharma. If he becomes a ruler, he will possess the seven great treasures.

The treasures represent seven essential qualities of a righteous ruler:

- **Wheel Treasure:** the Power of Truth and the Dharma itself;
- **Elephant Treasure:** virtue or morality;
- **Horse Treasure:** dispassion, renunciation, dispassion;
- **Jewel Treasure:** wisdom;
- **Woman Treasure:** ecstasy or bliss;
- **Householder Treasure:** skill; and
- **Counsellor Treasure:** power.

However, a righteous world ruler conquers, not by force of arms, but by the Power of Truth, and rules his empire based on justice and law.

A buddha, the sutta says, draws back the veil from the world—implying that reality is veiled or obscured from sight. The world that we perceive is not reality. It is a false front or, as we might say today, "virtual."

Modern commentators endlessly emphasize how odd the thirty-two marks of a great man are, but most of them are not hard to imagine. The tradition says that the Buddha had flat feet, with prominent heels and ankles; long fingers and toes; soft and tender hands and feet, with a bit of a web between the fingers and toes; strong and shapely legs; long arms; a clear golden complexion; delicate and smooth skin; distinct curly bluish-black body hairs; an erect posture; well-rounded limbs, shoulders and trunk; a powerful, rounded chest; a perfect sense of taste; powerful jaws; forty even, closely spaced, white teeth; a beautiful voice; deep blue eyes; long eyelashes; a mole with fine white hairs between his eyes; and a prominent cranium. This really tells us little about the actual physical appearance of the Buddha, but Rhys Davids suggests that the mole between the eyebrows and the protruding cranium may represent physical idiosyncrasies of the historical Buddha.

This sutta, like many others, is written in both verse and prose. Each verse section is presented as a summary of the prose section that precedes it, but the prose section could equally be viewed as a commentary. Verse has the merit of being more easily memorized than prose. Thus, the question arises, which came first, the prose or the poem? It is widely held that the earliest extant forms of Buddhist discourse appear in verse, although of course the Buddha did not usually speak in verse.[369] On the other hand, linguistic analysis suggests that the poetry was less edited than the prose. Hajime Nakamura states that the verse sections predate the prose sections. Similarly, the verse sections of the Jatakas are canonical, but the

[369] Rupert Gethin, the president of the Pali Text Society, has however described the Buddha as a poet.

prose sections are not. Pande, however, says that whereas "verse is a greater conserving medium and in oral transmission likely to be more conservative than prose…where prose and verse occur together, it is impossible to say in general whether the one or the other is older,"[370] and rejects drawing any conclusions regarding stratification based on whether the text is in verse or prose. Pande's caution seems to be supported, at least in the context of this sutta, by Walshe's note that the metres of the verses in this sutta indicate that they are of late date. However, a late date of composition proves neither that the constituent material is also late nor that it is a logical or philosophical non sequitur.

The qualities and characteristics of a future buddha are, like everything else, the result of karma. Each of these characteristics seems to symbolize a noble quality earned in former lives. Thus, this theory of the thirty-two marks of a great man is really a codification of the general theory of karma, identifying the cause of each characteristic and its effects in the present life, which are comparable, both for world rulers and for buddhas. There is also a Mahayana sutra, called the Karma Sutra, which compiles a similar list of karmic causes and effects. The Lakkhana Sutta presents this list as a sort of secret or at least unknown knowledge, despite the Buddha's insistence elsewhere that he makes no distinction between esoteric and exoteric.

The 32 marks of a great man and corresponding karmic qualities

	Mark	**Cause**	**Effect**
1	Feet with level tread	Meritorious deeds	Cannot be impeded
2	Wheels with 1000 spokes on soles	Provides for happiness of people	Large retinue
3	Projecting heels	Avoids killing	Longevity
4	Long fingers and toes	Avoids killing	Longevity
5	Soft and tender hands and feet	Sympathy	People well-disposed
6	Webbed hands and feet	Sympathy	People well-disposed
7	High raised ankles	Dispenses welfare	Chief of all
8	Legs like an antelope's	Skilfulness	Acquires things he needs

[370] Pande, *Studies in the Origin of Buddhism,* p. 50.

9	Can touch and rub his knees with either hand	Considerate	Wealthy and virtuous
10	Male organ enclosed in a sheath	Reunites families	Large progeny
11	Bright golden complexion	Avoids anger and generous	Receives fine "stuffs"
12	Delicate smooth skin	Ethics	Wisdom
13	Separate body hairs	Truthfulness	Obedience of others
14	Curly, blue-black, upwardly growing body hairs	Dispenses dharma (just?)	Chief of all
15	Straight body	Avoids killing	Longevity
16	Seven convex surfaces	Gives fine food	Receives fine food and drink
17	Front part of body like a lion's	Desires the welfare of people	Success
18	No hollow between shoulders	Desires the welfare of people	Success
19	Proportioned like a banyan tree	Considerate	Wealthy and virtuous
20	Evenly rounded chest	Seeks the welfare of people	Success
21	Perfect sense of taste	Harmlessness	Suffers little; good digestion
22	Jaws like a lion's	Avoids idle chatter	Cannot be overcome
23	Forty teeth	Avoids slander	Unity of the people
24	Even teeth	Right livelihood	Purity
25	No spaces between teeth	Avoids slander	Unity of the people
26	Canine teeth very bright	Right livelihood	Purity
27	Very long tongue	Avoids harsh speech	Persuasiveness
28	Brahma-like, melodious ('bird-like")	Avoids harsh speech	Persuasiveness
29	Deep blue eyes	Straightforward and kind	Popularity
30	"Cow-like" eyelashes	Avoids harsh speech	Persuasiveness
31	White hairs between eyebrows	Truthfulness	Obedience of others
32	Head like a royal turban	Leadership	Loyalty

Although some of these signs may be interpreted in various ways as the normal appearance of the Buddha, the only way to completely reconcile this list with normality would be to posit the Buddha as a shape shifter, like the naga who sought entry to the sangha after assuming human form. The nagas also inspired several great Buddhist saints. Some naga characteristics of the Buddha from the list of the thirty-two marks include webbed hands and feet, smooth

skin, super-senses, and a long tongue. The suttas describe the Buddha as "trans-human." He is also declared to be a naga himself.[371]

This analysis shows that at the time of the Buddha there was a divinatory science of physiognomy, in which the signs of past karma could be "read" in the body of the infant and inferences made about their future destiny. Such a science is implied by the repeated reference to "Those who read the marks and signs, / Experts in such lore."[372] This also implies that karma determines, not just the experiences of life and psychological tendencies, but also one's physical genetic makeup. From the accepted secular perspective, genetic outcomes are the results of random chance, but the concept of randomness is not emphasized in Buddhism, which is based on interdependent origination and karma: everything affects, effects, and is the effect of everything else. Therefore, there are no coincidences.[373] Identifying one's best and worst features in this life guides us how to overcome this bad karma through practice. These qualities also provide a checklist of the qualities that must be cultivated in order to become a buddha.

The list also gives an unusual view of the Five Precepts (*pansil*), in which each of the precepts is complemented by a good action too, not just an avoidance, showing that the Buddha in past lives did not merely abstain from bad karma, but also cultivated good karma.

Karmic correlations of the precepts

Bad karma (avoided)	**Good karma (cultivated)**	**Karmic effect**
Taking life	Compassion	Longevity
Stealing	Generosity	Good disposition toward him by others
Wrong speech (lying, idle chatter, gossip, harshness)	Truthfulness, speaking at the right time, peacemaking, agreeableness	Obedience by others, cannot be overcome, unity of the people, persuasiveness

[371] See S 1.38.
[372] D 30.2.3.
[373] Cf. Jung's doctrine of synchronicity.

Neither sensuality nor alcohol is emphasized in this important list of the attributes of a buddha. We also see traces of the Noble Eightfold Path, especially Right Speech, Action, and Livelihood.

There are a few points of interest in this list of karmic qualities. First, in connection with the wheel-spoked soles of a buddha, the text states that the Buddha's retinue (or sangha) includes, in addition to male and female monastics and lay followers or householders, devas, anti-gods, nagas, and *gandhabbas*: i.e., non-humans (yet nagas are prohibited from joining the sangha). Devas are the "shining beings" already discussed. *Asuras,* however, are notoriously evil beings, even demonic, generally translated 'anti-gods,' but here the sutta implies that there are anti-gods who are also Buddhist, perhaps because the Buddha himself was "anti-God."[374] We see a hint of this when the devas and anti-gods congregate together to honour the Buddha.[375]

Nagas are also morally ambiguous creatures. Snake or dragon beings, especially cobras with one or many heads, they dwell in lakes, oceans, or underground streams and caverns, as well as on the human-inhabited earth. They are also associated with treasure and hidden esoteric writings of great importance, called *termas* (lit. 'hidden treasures'). The *nagas* are also able to appear as people, apparently at will. There is a story of a naga who wished to ordain as a Buddhist monastic, so clearly nagas include Buddhists. The nagas serve Virupaksa, the Guardian of the West in the realm of the Four Great Kings. They protect the devas of the realm of the Thirty-Three from the anti-gods and act as messengers between the Thirty-Three Gods and the realm of the Four Great Kings, who are charged with monitoring humanity.

The nagas are not unremittedly evil. The naga Mucalinda protects the Buddha from a great storm for seven days, four weeks after

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374 The Buddha exhibits other affinities for the anti-gods, too, such as his appeal to an ancient tradition, his rejection of Brahmanic caste superiority, his liberality, and his defence of women's rights.

375 See D 20.

his enlightenment, by covering his head with his hood. Sariputta and Moggallana, the two chief disciples of the Buddha, are called *mahanagas* (lit. 'great snakes'). Nagas also appear commonly in the names of great Buddhist philosophers (e.g., Dignaga, an Indian Buddhist logician; Nagarsena, who compiled the *Questions of King Milinda*; and the great Buddhist philosopher, Nagarjuna). The Vajrayana and Mahasiddha traditions include esoteric texts associated with nagas. The Prajnaparamita is traditionally held to have been revealed to Nagarjuna by a naga. Thus, in addition to what we recognize as ordinary human dharma, Buddhism clearly posits that there are naga, anti-god, and deva *Buddhadharmas* too.

A *gandhabbha* (Skt. *gandarva*) is the lowest-ranking deva in Buddhist cosmology. They are subject to Drtarastra, the guardian of the East in the realm of the Four Great Kings. Those who practise only elementary ethics are reborn here. A *gandhabba* appears in sutta 18 in connection with the rebirth of King Bimbisara of Magadha. Incidentally, this is not a very impressive rebirth, suggesting that Bimbisara was not that great a king, despite being a follower of the Buddha and a stream entrant.

The sutta also reveals that the Buddha, despite his poverty, was still able to enjoy a good meal. I mentioned this point before in the context of a discussion of the Buddha's liberality in his conduct with women, including prostitutes, and the accusations of laxness that the Group of Five, Devadatta, and others levelled against him during his life.

The sutta also alludes to the seven treasures of a buddha: faith, morality, shame, dread, learning, renunciation, and wisdom. The wisdom of a buddha has six aspects, a formula that Ananda and the Buddha apply to Sariputta, the disciple foremost in wisdom. Such wisdom is great, extensive, joyous, swift, penetrative, and discerning, implying perhaps that it is metaphysical, universal, happy, incisive, profound, and analytical. We also learn four ways to be loved: be generous, use pleasing speech, engage in beneficial conduct, and remain impartial.

Advice to Sigalaka

Digha Nikaya 31

Country: Magadha
Locale: Squirrels' Feeding Place, Bamboo Grove, Rajagaha
Speakers: Sigalaka, the Buddha

The story of this sutta occurred as the Buddha is walking from the Bamboo Grove to Rajagaha, early in the morning. En route, Sigalaka, the son of a householder, is performing a ritual salutation with "folded hands" to the six directions—east, south, west, north, nadir, zenith—outside Rajagaha, presumably near the road on which the Buddha is travelling. The sutta says that Sigalaka's hair is wet, presumably because of a ritual immersion in a nearby river.

The Buddha, seeing this, goes to Sigalaka and asks him why he is doing this. Sigalaka tells him that he is doing it to honour his father's dying wish. The Buddha tells Sigalaka that this is not the way to do it according to the Aryan[376] discipline. The Buddha's approach to Sigalaka is uncharacteristically direct. Whereas the Buddha usually seeks out common ground and waits to be invited to converse,

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376 Derived from Sanskrit *arya* (lit. 'one who strives upward'), the Pali variation is *ariya*; also *ayir* and *ayya*. An aryan is an aspirant. The dictionary meaning of the word is 'noble,' 'distinguished,' 'of high birth,' 'in accordance with the customs and ideals of the Aryan clans,' 'held in esteem by Aryans,' 'generally approved.' Hence, 'right,' 'good,' ideal.' Peter Masefield criticizes the translation of 'noble' and proposes 'supermundane.' Where he does not translate the word as 'noble,' Walshe uses the Anglicization 'Ariyan' (e.g., "Ariyan Abiding," "Ariyan Dispositions").

here he interrupts Sigalaka and bluntly tells him that he is wrong to be doing what he is doing. Sigalaka then asks him how to do it.

The Buddha's answer shows the essence of the Buddha's restoration of the Aryan tradition. He does not reject the ritual so much as reinterpret it. Rather, the Buddha says, the Aryan disciple covers the six directions by avoiding fourteen evil ways, including four defilements of action, not doing evil from four causes, and not wasting one's substance in six ways. Thus, he conquers this world and the world to come.

The four defilements of action (*kamma-kilesa*) are the familiar four precepts: killing, stealing, adultery, and lying. In the subsequent versification of this passage, sexual misconduct seems to be equated with adultery, as it is elsewhere in the Pali Canon. The four causes of evil are desirous attachment, anger, folly, and fear.

The six ways of wasting one's substance are addiction to drink, frequenting the streets at the wrong time, going to fairs, gambling, keeping bad company, and idleness. The Buddha expands on each of these, providing six dangers associated with each. The Buddha identifies four enemies who appear to be friends: the taker, the talker, the flatterer, and the spendthrift.

The Buddha then identifies four loyal friends: the helping friend, the constant friend, the guiding friend, and the sympathetic friend.

The Buddha concludes his ethical discourse with the poem that follows. Note the second stanza:

> The wise man trained and disciplined
> Shines out like a beacon-fire.
> He gathers wealth just as the bee
> Gathers honey, and it grows
> Like an ant hill higher yet,
> With wealth so gained the layman can
> Devote it to his people's good.
>
> He should divide his wealth in four
> (This will most advantage bring).
> One part he may enjoy at will,

Two parts he should put to work,
The fourth part he should set aside
As reserve in time of need. (26)

In this fascinating passage, the Buddha praises wealth creation, somewhat surprising given his emphasis on moderate poverty, but that is the monastic path. For the householder, the Buddha recommends saving three-quarters of one's income, half in investments and a quarter as an emergency reserve, thus becoming quite possibly the first financial planner in history. The Buddhist householder should use his accumulated wealth for the benefit of others. The wealthy have a social obligation to compensate others for their privilege. The Buddha explains the six directions as an allegory in which each direction represents a specific social relationship.

The allegorical correspondences of the six directions

East	Mother and father
South	Teachers
West	Wife and children
North	Friends and companions
Nadir	Servants, workers, and helpers
Zenith	Ascetics and Brahmans

The sequence is the same as in the opening paragraph of the sutta. It implies a clockwise direction, which is associated with invocation and good energy.

Although it seems that the Buddha is equating Sigalaka's prayer ritual with an ethical substitute, the reader is cautioned against jumping to the conclusion that this means that ritual = ethics. Remember that Sigalaka is a householder. Therefore, the Buddha is tailoring his comments to the station of his hearer, as was his wont. If the Buddha was speaking with a monastic, it is quite likely that the equation would be different. However, the Buddha's allegorical way of reinterpreting religious rituals establishes the point that ritual in and of itself has no value or efficacy and its only value lies in its interior, ethical, or even deeper meaning, i.e., the psycho-

symbolic. This is true even in Tantra, though religious Buddhists tend to forget it.

The Buddha identifies five ways that one should minister to each of these groups. For example, one should support one's parents, perform their duties for them, keep up the family tradition, be worthy of one's inheritance, and distribute gifts on their behalf after their death. Similarly, parents should restrain their offspring from evil, support them in doing good, teach them some skill, find them a suitable spouse, and finally hand over their inheritance to them. According to the Buddha, this will "cover" the eastern direction, making it "at peace" and "free from fear." Presumably, this refers to the social benefits of the recommended ethical attitudes.

Similarly, the Buddha discusses the ways in which pupils should minister to their teachers and teachers to their pupils, a husband to his wife and a wife to her husband, friends and companions to each other, an employer to their workers and workers to their employer, a lay person to ascetics and Brahmans and ascetics and Brahmans to lay people.

The Buddha's advice is conventional. The relationship between husbands and wives involves mutual respect and fulfilling each one's duty to the other. There is nothing here about women being slaves to men, as we find elsewhere in the Pali Canon.[377] Men have an obligation to honour and not disparage their wives, be faithful, and yield authority over the household to them, much as in ancient Greek society. Similarly, employers have an obligation to arrange the work of their employees according to their strength, provide them with food and wages, provide health care benefits when they are sick, and let them off work at a decent time. This confirms that the Buddha's social views are what we today would call progressive, which is remarkable considering that it has taken nearly 2,500 years to achieve anything approaching the Buddha's advice, and only in a handful of social democratic countries, representing a tiny fraction of the earth.

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[377] See A 7.63.

The Buddha breaks the fivefold pattern somewhat in the relations with ascetics and Brahmans. He counts kindness in body, speech, and thought as three things, thus getting five in combination with keeping an open house and supplying their physical needs. However, the ascetics and Brahmans will reciprocate in six ways: restraining them from evil, encouraging them to do good, being compassionate toward them, teaching them what they have not heard, and pointing out the way to heaven (heaven being the highest state that non-Buddhist ascetics and Brahmans can aspire to achieve).

The Protective Chant

Digha Nikaya 32

Country: Magadha
Locale: Vulture's Peak, Rajagaha
Speakers: Vessavana, the Buddha

There are several deva suttas in the Digha Nikaya.[378] This sutta is a "protective discourse." The word *atanatiya* is derived from *tana,* 'protection,' 'refuge,' 'shelter.' The Buddha refers positively to mantra. There are also a number of such suttas, including the Ratana Sutta,[379] Khanda Paritta, Dhajagga Paritta, Mora Paritta, and the Angulimala Paritta. The Metta Sutta[380] is also used for this purpose. He also refers to the Power of Truth and the Transfer of Merit. These texts provide further evidence that the Pali Canon includes a proto-tantric element, a.k.a. mantra-yoga. There are also books of *parittas*.

The Four Great Kings are the lords of the realm next above our own earth-plane. These, together with an array of *yakkhas* ('nature spirits'), *gandhabbas* ('aerial devas'), *kumbhandas* ('dwarfs'), and nagas ('snake devas'), who are charged with the defence or protection of the four quarters, go to see the Buddha just before dawn.

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[378] D 19, 20, 21, 32.
[379] SN 2.1.
[380] Ibid, 1.8.

These devas are described as intensely luminous. They all sit around the Buddha.

Vessavana, the King of the North, asks the Buddha why most *yakkhas* are not Buddhists. The way Walshe punctuates the text suggests that Vessavana answers his own question, whereas Rhys Davids implies that the Buddha answers this question to the effect that it is because refraining from killing, stealing, adultery, lying, and drink[381] is distasteful to them. He points out that many monastics dwell in the deep forest where there are no people, but many non-Buddhist *yakkhas* also live there. Non-humans seem to prefer uninhabited places, a characteristic shared with UFOs. For this reason, in order to protect the monastics from the *yakkhas,* Vessavana teaches the protective verses to the Buddha so that he can communicate them to the sangha. Although *yakkhas* are generally benevolent, these *yakkhas* are ghouls that haunt the wilderness and waylay and devour travellers, like *rakshasas* ('demons'). Thus, this is also what I have called a deva sutta, a dharma teaching received from the devas.

Before reciting the protective verses, King Vessavana says,

> If any monk or nun, male or female lay follower learns these verses well and has them off by heart, then if any non-human being, male or female yakkha or yakkha-offspring, or a chief attendant or servant of the yakkhas, any male or female gandhabba, ...kumbhanda, ...naga, ...should approach that person with hostile intent while he or she is walking or starting to walk, standing or rising to stand, seated or sitting down, lying down or starting to lie down, that non-human being would not gain any honour or respect in village or town. Such a being would not gain a footing or a lodging in my royal city of Alakamanda, he would not be admitted to the yakkhas' assembly, nor would he be acceptable for taking or giving in marriage. And all the non-human beings, full of rage, would overwhelm him with abuse. Then they would bend down his head like an empty bowl, and they would split his skull into seven pieces. (8)

[381] Note the inclusion of alcohol this time.

The poem begins with an adoration of the Seven Buddhas of Antiquity—Vipassi, Sikhi, Vessabhu, Kakusandha, Konagamana, and Gotama—except that Kassapa gets left out and seems to have been replaced by Angirasa, an epithet of the Buddha meaning 'the Resplendent One.' These are seven prehistoric buddhas—except for Gotama—who bridge the transition from the previous age, called the Glorious Eon, to our own time, called the Auspicious Eon. The adoration of the buddhas is followed by an invocation of the lords of the four directions—Dhatarattha in the East, Virulhaka in the South, Virupakkha in the West, and Vessavana (a.k.a. Kuvera) in the North. These descriptions include some interesting details, including a reference to ghosts living in the south, which include abusive speakers, slanderers, murderers, greedy people, thieves, and cunning tricksters and an ideal, inaccessible land in the North, called Kuru, once again illustrating how later traditions like Vajrayana have their basis in the Pali Canon (I am referring to Shambhala and similar mythologems).

Northern Kuru, or Uttarakuru, is one of the four continents of Buddhist cosmology. It is traditionally described as an island in the far north, about two thousand *yojanas* square. At the time of Ashoka a *yojana* was roughly 7 km (4 miles). Thus, two thousand yojanas equals 14,000 km (9,000 miles), or nearly 200 million square kilometers (76 million sq. miles), about 2/5ths of the earth's surface area. However, in the Digha Nikaya it is also the name of a city. The inhabitants of Uttarakuru are described as extremely prosperous, long-lived, communitarian, and living a thousand years, something that seems far less improbable now that anti-ageing researchers are beginning to talk seriously about functional human immortality. According to the Mahabharata, the Kurus practise free love. Their cities are aerial, like the floating geodesic spheres described by R. Buckminster Fuller or some large UFOs. Clearly, then, they are also highly technically advanced. Like Shambhala, Uttarakuru is virtually inaccessible to outsiders. The original Vedic reference to Uttarakuru places it beyond the Himalayas. The inhabitants of Kuru, a *mahajanapada* in the northwest region of northeast India, were said to have been descended from them. Satulakayi, the

wife of Jotika, who became an arhant, is reputed to come from Uttarakuru.[382] The verses conclude with an adoration of the Buddha.

The great conflict among the devas resulted in the anti-gods being cast down into the one world ocean at the foot of Mount Meru during the late Vedic period (ca. 1500–500 BCE). Here Vessavana describes something similar in the context of the Four Great Kings: "There are, sir, some non-human beings who are fierce, wild and terrible."[383]

Sometimes monastics would experience themselves being attacked by these beings.[384] The Buddha also describes the intense fear that one experiences alone in the deep forest. Although northeast India seems quite arid today, the frequent references to deep forest in the Pali Canon suggest that the area was far more heavily forested, like many places in our diminishing world. The Bodhisattva himself experienced this fear when meditating at the beginning of his career. It is tempting to apply Western "psychologism" to this phenomenon and say that they are experiencing hallucinations because of sensory deprivation and intense emotional agitation. However, one could just as easily say that these psychological states are simply creating the conditions necessary to perceive actual spiritual beings that exist on the threshold of consciousness. Vessavana gives a list of forty-one *yakkhas,* great *yakkhas,* commanders, and commanders in chief, which include the names of gods, ancient rishis, *yakkhas,* and nagas. In a manner reminiscent of Western occultism, Vessavana recommends invoking the names of these beings if one is attacked. A contemporary example is that of a Thai Buddhist monastic—a Westerner—who recited the protective verses to ward off a cobra that entered his cave.[385]

In conclusion, the Buddha says, "Monks, you should learn these Atanata protective verses, master them and remember them. They

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[382] DhA 4.199–213.
[383] Cf. the Cabalistic *qliphoth.*
[384] Another trope shared with UFOs.
[385] See Mettiko, "Ghost Story."

are for your benefit, and through them monks and nuns, male and female lay followers may dwell guarded, protected, unharmed, and at ease."[386]

[386] D 32.13.

The Collective Recitation

Digha Nikaya 33

Country: Malla
Location: mango grove of Cunda the smith at Pava
Speaker: Sariputta

The Buddha is staying at the mango grove of Cunda the smith, who fatally poisons the Buddha at the end of his life.[387] Pava is the place where Mahavira, the leader of the Jains, recently died. Thus, this sutta may be dated toward the end of the Buddha's life. The Mallan's built a new meeting hall, called Ubbhataka (lit. 'standing tall'), which had not yet been used by anyone. They invite the Buddha to be the first person to speak there.

The Buddha sits with his back against the central pillar, facing east, with the monastics sitting behind him against the western wall, also facing east. The Mallas sit against the eastern wall, facing the Buddha. This seems to be the standard arrangement when the Buddha is giving formal public talks. He teaches dharma well into the night, after which the Mallans leave, leaving the Buddha and the monastics alone. The Buddha suggests to Sariputta that he give a dharma talk to the monastics, not yet drowsy, while the Buddha

[387] D 16.

stretches his aching back.[388] The Buddha lies down on his robe, neatly folded in four, in the "lion posture," on his right side, within earshot of Sariputta.

Sariputta, alluding to the recent death of Mahavira, calls upon the monastics to recite the teachings of the Buddha in order to avoid the disgraceful state of affairs in the Jain order, much as described in sutta 29.

The balance of the sutta—thirty pages in Walshe's translation—consists of a rehearsal of principles arranged in 230 numbered sets of items starting with groups of one and ending with groups of ten things. Thus, Sariputta speaks the rest of this sutta with the Buddha's approval.

The principles were chanted as follows:

- 2 sets of one thing;
- 33 sets of two things;
- 60 sets of three things;
- 50 sets of four things;
- 26 sets of five things;
- 22 sets of six things;
- 14 sets of seven things;
- 11 sets of eight things;
- 6 sets of nine things; and
- 6 sets of ten things.

There are 1,010 principles identified in this short text. In fact, there are even more principles implied than this, because this list includes references to other groups, such as three unwholesome roots, four foundations of awareness, five aggregates, and many more. Nor can we meaningfully discuss the ten groups, because their only relationship with each other is the number of items in

[388] Since the Buddha suffered form back problems at the end of his life, this sutta is probably relatively late, and indicates the increasing emphasis on consolidating the teachings of the Buddha for posterity.

that group. This ingenious method, however, enabled the dharma to be passed on from generation to generation in an extremely succinct and comprehensive way.[389]

[389] Further examples showing how the suttas are constructed may be found in the Vinaya. The repetition of ten seems to be intentional. See the next sutta.

Progressing by Tens

Digha Nikaya 34

Country: Anga
Locale: Gaggara lotus pond in Campa
Speaker: Sariputta

Sariputta is staying at the lotus pond of Gaggara in Campa, in the territory of the Angas. He classifies the dharma into ten sets of ten things. This seems to be a distillation of the principles of the previous sutta according to Sariputta. These things are inherently and absolutely true, perfectly realized by the Tathagata. There are 550 items. Walshe points out that about 70% of these overlap with those listed in the previous sutta.

The organization of the ten sets of things in sutta 34 follows a consistent logic:

Wisdom

1. Which things greatly help?
2. Which things are to be developed?
3. Which things are to be thoroughly known?

Morality

4. Which things are to be abandoned?
5. Which things conduce to diminution?

Meditation

6. Which things conduce to distinction?
7. Which things are hard to penetrate?
8. Which things are to be made to arise?
9. Which things are to be thoroughly learnt?
10. Which things are to be realized?

One can see the progression from *things that help* to *things realized,* making this list far more accessible than the one in sutta 33. This series may be seen as a summary recapitulation of the path itself. Items 1–3 clearly constitute a group, followed by items 4 and 5, and finally items 6 through 10, constituting three groups corresponding roughly to knowledge, morality, and finally meditation or spiritual practice. Items 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 9, and 10 have a good character, whereas items 4, 5, and 7 have a negative cast. 4 and 5 appear to be opposites.

Each set of ten addresses these items by including an increasing number of one, two, three, etc. By cross-referencing, we can gain a summary insight into the dharma.

The summary that follows is a slight simplification of the items presented in the sutta, so each group may not appear to add up to exactly ten items.

SUMMARY OF ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES

1. **Things that Greatly Help:** Tirelessness in wholesome states, awareness, clear awareness, association with good people, hearing the true dharma, dharma practice in its entirety, a favourable place of residence, perfect development of one's personality, past meritorious acts, factors of endeavour, wisdom in the fundamentals of the holy life, wise consideration, and protective things.
2. **Things to Be Developed:** Awareness of the body with pleasure, calm, insight, concentration, foundations of awareness, factors of enlightenment, the Noble Eightfold Path, effort toward perfect purity, and absorption in the objects of concentration.
3. **Things to Be Thoroughly Known:** Contact, mind-body, feelings, foods, aggregates of grasping, sense-spheres, stations of consciousness, worldly conditions, and abodes of beings.
4. **Things to Be Abandoned:** Ego-conceit, ignorance, cravings, the hindrances, latent proclivities, and the wrong eightfold path plus wrong knowledge and wrong liberation.
5. **Things Conducive to Diminution:** Unwise attention, roughness, friendship with evil, unwholesome roots,

attachments, mental blockages, disrespect, wrong practices, indolence, malice, and unwholesome courses of action.

6. **Things Conducive to Distinction:** Wise attention, gentleness, friendship with the good, wholesome roots, freedom from attachments, respect, right practices, effort, overcoming malice, and wholesome courses of action.

7. **Things Hard to Penetrate:** Concentration, the root of the defilement and purification of beings, the elements of deliverance, qualities of the True Person, inopportune times for leading the holy life, ontological differentiation, and the noble dispositions.

8. **Things to Be Made to Arise:** Unshakeable knowledge; the destruction of the defilements; knowledge of past, present, and future; knowledge of the Four Noble Truths; knowledge of right concentration; stability; perception; and thoughts of a Great Person.

9. **Things to Be Thoroughly Learnt:** Food, the conditioned and unconditioned, the elements, the Four Noble Truths, the bases of deliverance, grounds for commendation, states of mastery, successive abidings, and the causes of wearing away.

10. **Things to Be Realized:** Unshakeable deliverance of mind, knowledge and liberation, knowledge of karma, the fruits of the ascetic life, the branches of dharma and knowledge and vision of liberation, the superknowledges, the powers of an arhant, the jhanas, and the Noble Eightfold Path plus knowledge and right liberation.

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MORAL PRACTICE

It is, monastics, for elementary, inferior matters of moral practice that the worldling would praise the Tathagata. (D 1.1.7)

GNOSIS

There are, monastics, other matters, profound, hard to see, hard to understand, peaceful, excellent, beyond mere thought, subtle, to be experienced by the wise, which the Tathagata, having realized them by superknowledge, proclaims, and about which those who would truthfully praise the Tathagata would rightly speak. (D 1.1.28)

REBIRTH

These viewpoints thus grasped and adhered to will lead to such and such destinations in another world. This the Tathagata knows, and more, but he is not attached to that knowledge. (D 1.1.36)

Wrong view leads to one of two destinies—hell or an animal rebirth. (D 1.2.10)

THE RADIANT DEVAS

There comes a time, monastics, eventually, after a long period, when this world contracts. At a time of contraction, beings are mostly reborn in the Abhasara [lit. 'possessing splendour'] Brahma world. In addition, there they dwell, mind-made, feeding on delight, self-luminous, moving through the air, glorious—and they stay like that for a very long time. (D 1.2.2

THE TATHAGATA

Monastics, the body of the Tathagata stands with the link that bound it to becoming cut. (D 1.3.73)

MONASTICS

Having accepted sufficient, he goes on his way. Just as a bird with wings flies hither and thither, burdened by nothing but its wings, so he is satisfied...In this way, Sire, a monastic is contented. (D 2.66)

THE BODY

Therefore, this monastic suffuses, drenches, fills and irradiates his body so that no spot remains untouched. (D 2.76)

CONFESSION

He who acknowledges his transgression as such and confesses it for betterment in future will grow in the Aryan discipline. (D 2.100)

THE LAW OF KARMA

He teaches action and the results of action, honouring the blameless Brahman way of life. (D 4.6)

WISDOM

Wisdom is purified by morality, and morality is purified by wisdom. (D 4.21)

I teach a doctrine for getting rid of the gross acquired self, whereby defiling mental states disappear and states tending to purification grow strong, and one gains and remains in the purity and perfection of wisdom here and now, having realized and attained it by one's own superknowledge. (D 9.40)

Devotion to high thinking, this the Buddhas teach. (D 14.3.28)

The mind imbued with wisdom becomes completely free from the corruptions, that is, the corruption of becoming, of false views and of ignorance. (D 16.1.12)

THE ACQUIRED SELF

There are three kinds of acquired self [*atta-patilabha,* lit. 'attainment body']: the gross acquired self, the mind-made acquired self, and the formless acquired self. (D 9.39)

CONVENTIONAL LANGUAGE

Citta, these are merely names, expressions, turns of speech, designations in common use in the world, which the Tathagata uses without misapprehending them. (D 9.53)

The Tathagata understands these things...by his own penetration of the principles of Dharma, and devas, too, have told him. (D 14.1.15)

Thus far, then, Ananda we can trace birth and decay, death and falling into other states, and being reborn, thus far extends the way of designation, of concepts, thus far is the sphere of understanding, thus far the round goes as far as can be discerned in this life, namely to mind and body together with consciousness. (D 15.22)

As far, Ananda, as designation and the range of designation reaches, so far as language and the range of language reaches, as far as concepts and the range of concepts reaches, as far as understanding and the range of understanding reaches, as far as the cycle reaches and revolves—that monastic is liberated from all that by superknowledge. (D 15.32)

THE THREEFOLD DIVISION

Subha, there were three divisions of things which the Lord praised, and with which he aroused, exhorted and established people. Which three? The division of Aryan morality, the division of Aryan concentration, and the division of Aryan wisdom. (D 10.1.6)

MIRACLES

Kevaddha, this is not the way I teach Dharma to the monastics by saying: 'Go, monastics, and perform superhuman feats and miracles for the white-clothed lay people.' (D 11.1)

There are three kinds of miracle that I have declared, having realized them by my own insight. Which three? The miracle of psychic power, the miracle of telepathy, and the miracle of instruction. (D 11.3)

CESSATION

Where consciousness is signless, boundless, all luminous.
That is where earth, water, fire and air find no footing,
There long and short, small and great, fair and foul,
There 'name and form' are wholly destroyed.
With the cessation of consciousness, this is all destroyed. (D 11.85)

At the thought 'Cessation, cessation,' there arose in the Bodhisattva Vipassi, with insight into things never realized before, knowledge, vision, awareness, and light. (D 14.2.21)

BRAHMANISM

The talk of these Brahmans learned in the Three Vedas turns out to be laughable, mere words, empty and vain. (D 13.15)

Therefore, their threefold knowledge is called the threefold desert, the threefold wilderness, the threefold destruction. (D 13.36)

CONSCIOUSNESS

This consciousness turns back at mind and body; it does not go any further. ... Mind and body conditions consciousness, and consciousness conditions mind and body. (D 14.2.19)

INSIGHT

I have found the insight way to enlightenment. (D 14.2.21)

THE BUDDHA EPOCH

There are beings with little dust on their eyes who are perishing through not hearing Dharma: they will become knowers of Dharma! (D 14.3.3)

The holy life waxed mighty and prospered and spread widely as it was proclaimed among humankind. (D 18.29)

It is impossible, gentlemen, it cannot happen that two fully enlightened Buddhas should arise simultaneously in a single world system. (D 19.14)

THE DHARMA EYE

Whatever things have an origin must come to cessation. (D 14.3.11)

PROPERTY

The guarding of possessions is the root, the cause, the origin, the condition for all these evil unskilled states. (D 15.10)

Tathagatas never lie. (D 16.1.2)

EARTHBOUND DEVAS

At that time a multitude of thousands of devas were taking up lodging in Pataligama. And in the parts where powerful devas settled, they caused the minds of the most powerful royal officials to pick those sites for their dwellings, and where middle and lower ranking devas settled, so too they caused the minds of royal officials of corresponding grade to pick those sites for their dwellings. (D 16.1.26)

There are sky devas whose minds are earthbound; they are weeping and tearing their hair…And there are earth devas whose minds are earthbound; they do likewise. (D 16.6.11)

THE VINAYA

If they wish, the order may abolish the minor rules after my passing. (D 16.6.3)

IMMORTALITY

Open are the doors of the Deathless. (D 18.27)

DHARMA

Well-proclaimed, truly, is this Lord's Teaching, visible here and now, timeless, inviting inspection, leading onward, to be realized by the wise each one for himself—and we can find no proclaimer of such an onward-

leading doctrine, either in the past or in the present, other than the Lord. (D 19.6)

The Lord has transcended doubt, passed beyond all 'how' and 'why.' (D 19.12)

PROLIFERATION

Desire, Ruler of the Gods, arises from thinking. ...When the mind thinks about something, desire arises, when the mind thinks about nothing, desire does not arise. ...Thinking, Ruler of the Gods, arises from the tendency to proliferation. (D 21.2.2)

SECTARIANISM

The world, Ruler of the Gods, is made up of many and various elements. Such being the case, beings adhere to one or another of these various things, and whatever they adhere to, they become powerfully addicted to and declare: 'This alone is the truth, everything else is false!' (D 21.2.6)

Nigrodha, you may think: 'The ascetic Gotama says that in order to get disciples.' However, you should not regard it like that. Let your rules remain as they are. On the other hand, you may think: 'He wants us to abandon our rules.' However, you should not regard it like that. Let your way of life remain as it was. On the other hand, you may think: 'He wants to establish us in the doing of things that according to our teaching are wrong, and are so considered among us.' However, you should not regard it like that. Let those things you consider to be wrong continue to be so considered. On the other hand, you may think: 'He wants to draw us away from things that according to our teaching are good, and are so considered among us.' However, you should not regard it like that. Let whatever you consider right continue to be so considered. Nigrodha, I do not speak for any of these reasons. (D 25.23)

THE ARHANT

Whoever should practise these four foundations of awareness for just one week may expect one of two results: either arhantship in this life or, if there were some substrate left, the state of a non-returner. (D 22.22)

TIME DILATION

That which is for people, Prince, a hundred years is for the Thirty-Three Gods one day and night. (D 23.11)

THE OTHER WORLD

The other world cannot be seen the way you think, with the physical eye. (D 23.11)

You, Prince, will come to ruin and destruction if you foolishly and unwisely seek the other world in the wrong way. (D 23.23)

THE SANGHA

This is the order of the Lord's disciples worthy of respect, worthy of homage, worthy of gifts, worthy of salutation, an unsurpassed field in the world for merit. (D 24.1.6)

REFUGE

Monastics, be islands unto yourselves, be a refuge unto yourselves with no other refuge. Let the Dharma be your island, let the Dharma be your refuge, with no other refuge. (D 26.1)

THE DEGENERATE AGE

All will be promiscuous in the world like goats and sheep, fowl and pigs, dogs and jackals. Among them, fierce enmity will prevail, one for another, fierce hatred, fierce anger and thoughts of killing, mother against child and child against mother, father against child and child against father, brother against brother, brother against sister, just as the hunter feels hatred for the beast he stalks. (D26.20)

THE VISION OF LIGHT

A monastic attends to the perception of light; he fixes his mind to the perception of day, by night as by day, by day as by night. In this way, with a mind clear and unclouded, he develops a state of mind that is full of brightness. (D 33.1.11[5])

THE ANCIENT TRADITION

The one who is thus skilled, not lax, clearly aware and mindful, is known as a monastic who is true to the ancient original Aryan lineage. (D 33.11.1[9][b])

Chronology

NOTE: The date of the passing of the Buddha is the key date for ancient Indian chronology. Many scholars now place the death or parninibbana *of the Buddha between 410 and 370 BCE, which is significantly more recent than previously held. The chronology below reconstructs the dates of significant people and events referred to in this book based on an arbitrary median date for the Parinibbana of 395 BCE.,*[390] *I have also included some significant non-Buddhist dates for comparison.*

514 BCE. Birth of Maya, the mother of the Buddha.
497 BCE. Birth of Mahavira.
495 BCE. Marriage of Suddhodana, the father of the Buddha, and Maya.
475 BCE (June). Conception of Gotama.
474 BCE (March). Birth of Gotama. Death of Maya.
471 BCE. Birth of Bimbisara.
467 BCE. Mahavira renounces the home life at the age of 30.
456 BCE. Mahavira attains "omniscience." Bimbisara ascends the throne.
446 BCE. Renunciation of Gotama. Meets Bimbisara.
440 BCE (May). Enlightenment of Gotama. First sermon. First Buddhist mission is sent out for six years.
439 BCE. Conversion of Bimbisara.
439 BCE. First return to Kapilavastu. Ordination of Rahula.
436 BCE. Famine in Vesali.
436 BCE. Death of Suddhodhana. *Bhikkhunisangha* established.
434 BCE. First Vinaya recitation.
432 BCE. Buddha prohibits drinking alcohol in Kosambi.
430 BCE. Buddha retires to Parileyya Forest.

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[390] The closest date actually proposed by a scholar to the median consensus seems to be 397 BCE, proposed by K.T.S. Sarao. See Bechert, *When Did the Buddha Live,* p. 30.

429 BCE. Famine in Veranja.
425 BCE. Death of Mahavira at the age of 72.
420 BCE. Conversion of Angulimala.
420 BCE. Ananda becomes the personal attendant of the Buddha.
404 BCE. Abdication of Bimbisara in favour of his son, Ajatasattu.
403 BCE. Death of Bimbisara. Devadatta tries to murder the Buddha.
402 BCE. Death of Devadatta. Pasenadi defeats Ajatasattu.
399 BCE. Pasenadi dethroned by his son, Vidudabha. Dies of exposure and exhaustion. Death of Socrates.
398 BCE. Sariputta and Moggallana, the Buddha's two chief disciples, die.
397 BCE. Vassakara asks the Buddha about the Vajjis at the request of Ajatasattu.
397–396. Genocide of the Shakyans by Vidudabha, the son of Pasenadi.
396 BCE. Ajatasattu plots against the Vajji republic. The Buddha visits the royal courtesan, Ambapali. Spends the rains alone with Ananda in Beluva.
395 BCE (February-March). *Parinibbana* of the Buddha.
395–394 BCE (July-February). First Buddhist Council.
393 BCE. Ajatasattu attacks the Vajjians.
372 BCE. Ajatasattu murdered by his son, Udayabhadda.
356 BCE. End of reign of Udayin.
345–321 BCE. Nanda Empire.
327–325 BCE. Indian campaign of Alexander the Great.
c. 321–c. 297 BCE. Reign of Candragupta (b. c 340 BCE, d. 297 BCE).
c. 295 BCE. Second Buddhist Council.
279 BCE. The Great Schism (Prebish).
c. 268 BCE. Coronation of Ashoka.
c. 263 BCE. Conversion of Ashoka.
c. 250 BCE. Third Buddhist Council. Pali Canon more or less codified by this date.
232 BCE. Death of Ashoka.
103–89 BCE. The Great Famine (*Beminitiya Seya*) in Sri Lanka, resulting in the compilation of the Pali Canon during the Fourth Buddhist Council (29–17 BCE?).
104–03, 89–77/76 BCE. Reign of King Vattagamini Abhaya, Sri Lanka.

Abbreviations

A	Anguttara Nikaya
C	Chattha Sangayanat
D	Digha Nikaya
DhA	Dhammapadatthakatha
K	Khuddaka Nikaya
Lat.	Latin
M	Majjhima Nikaya
PED	Pali-English Dictionary
S	Samyutta Nikaya
Skt.	Sanskrit
SN	Sutta Nipata
Tib.	Tibetan
Ud	Udana
V	Vinaya

NOTE: All references are to the editions and translations listed in the References, Primary Resources.

Glossary

NOTE: All words refer to Pali unless indicated otherwise.

abhinna	transcendent knowledge, gnosis
abhi-sanna-nirodha	complete elimination of thinking
adesana	pointing out
adiccabandhu	kinsman of the sun
agada	medicine, drug
ajna (Skt.)	command, will (chakra)
akusala	demerit, negative propensity
anahata (Skt.)	unstruck (chakra)
anaya	misfortune
anicca	transience, ephemerality, impermanence
anidassanam	signless, unseen
aniyata	uncertain, indeterminate, irregular
antara	'in-between,' interval
antara-kappa	intermediate age
anusasani	advice, instruction
arista	alcoholic beverage
ariya	one who strives upward
arupaloka	formless world
asankheyya-kappa	medium age
asava	that which flows, discharge, alcoholic drink
atta	ego-self, soul
attapatilabha	acquisition of a personality
avijja	not knowing, ignorance, unconsciousness
avuso	friend, brother
ayasma	old, venerable
ayatana	sphere, region
ayu-kappa	duration of life

bardo (Tib.)	intermediate, transitional, 'in between' state
bhakti (Skt.)	devotion, love
bhante	lord, reverend sir
bhavanga	subconsciousness
bodhicitta (Skt.)	enlightenment-mind
brahant	increase, be great or strong
brahma	absolute, great, cosmos, space
brahmacharya	purity in thought, word, and deed
brahmavihara	divine state of mind
buddhavacana	teaching (lit. 'speech') of the Buddha
cakkavala	world, world-circle, sphere, solar system
catuskoti (Skt.)	suite of four discrete functions, indivisible quaternity, tetralemma
cetana	intention
chalabhinna	six branches of higher knowledge
chanda	impulse, will
citta	heart-mind
dhamma	doctrine, nature, truth
dhammadhatu	dharma dimension, realm, or sphere
dhammakaya	normal body
dhammanvaya	drift of the dharma
dhammata	general rule, nature
dhatu	element, principle, faculty, root
dhyana (Skt.)	meditation, concentration, one-pointedness
dibbacakkhu	Divine Eye
dipa	lamp, island, help, support
ditthi	view, eye, belief, dogma, heresy
dukkha	angst, ennui, suffering, dissatisfaction
ekayana	the only way or means
ergui (Chin.)	hungry ghost
gandhabba	musician (type of deva); being ready to take rebirth
ganika	prostitute
garulo (Skt. *garuda*)	large humanoid bird, mount of Vishnu
gatima	having the power of motion
gocara	nutriment, food, sense object, suitable place
Gijjhakuta	Vulture Peak

hatha	violence
hoti	being, becoming
iddhipada	basis of psychic power
jala	slow, stupid, net, entanglement
jara-marana	old age and death
jati	rebirth
jhana	meditative attainment, ecstasy, illumination
jiva	life
kamaloka	sensual world
kammabhava	becoming
kamma-kilesa	impure actions
kappa	age, thought
khanda	aggregate
khattiya	warrior caste
kumara	child
kumbhanda	pumpkin (kind of deva)
kusala	merit
lokadhatu	spherical world system
mada	intoxication, excess
madhu (Skt.)	mead, hydromel
madira	grain alcohol
magga	oath, road, way
maha	great
mahajana	people
mahajanapada	great state
maha-kappa	great age
mahanaga	great elephant, snake, or dragon
mahapurusha lakshana (Skt.)	marks of a great man
maha-satipatthana	great application of awareness
majja	brewage
manta	mantra, wisdom
mara	demonic being, army of Mara
matima	sensible, intelligent, wise
meraya (Skt. *maireya*)	fermented liquor
micchadhamma	false teaching
naga	snake or dragon deva
nagavradu	royal courtesan

nama-kaya	name-body
namarupa	mind-matter, body-mind, psycho-somatic
naraka	purgatory (lit. 'of man')
ngondro (Tib.)	something that goes before, something that precedes (Skt. *purvaka*)
nibbuti	tranquility, serenity, annihilation
nidana	cause (chain of causation)
nikaya	collection
niraya	purgatory
nirhti (Skt.)	absence of rita, lawless
nirmanakaya (Skt.)	emanation or manifestation body
nirodhasamapatti	attainment of cessation of consciousness
nissaggiya	what ought to be rejected or abandoned
nivritti (Skt.)	path of renunciation (lit. 'to turn back')
oja	strength, sap of life, nutritive essence, vitality
opapatika	arisen without apparent cause, spontaneously born
osadha	medicine, drug
pabbajita	gone forth, become a monk
pabbajja	taking the robe, ordination
pabha	light, radiance
paccekabuddha	lone buddha, buddha on their own, private buddha
pacittiya	confession
pada	reason, cause
padhana	exertion, effort, striving
pamada	negligence, indolence, remissness, carelessness
papanca	proliferation, differentiation (see *prapanca*)
parajika	defeat
paribbajaka	wandering religious mendicant
parinibbana	final emancipation from rebirth
paritta	protection, defence, protective charm
pasidati	becomes bright, pleases or purifies, is clear or devoted
paticcasamuppada	causal genesis, interdependent origination
patidesaniya	verbal acknowledgment
patilabha	attainment, acquisition, obtaining

patimokkha	monastic rules (lit. 'toward liberation')
patthana	aiming at, aspiration, desire
peta	ghost
pettika	paternal (lit. 'gone before')
pettike visaye	ancestral haunts
phala	fruit, result, consequence, fruition
phassa	touch, contact
phowa (Tib.)	transference of consciousness (Skt. *samkranti*)
prajna (Skt.)	consciousness, awareness, highest wisdom, transcendent wisdom
prana (Skt.)	life breath, life force, vital energy
prapanca (Skt.)	expansion of the universe (see *papanca*)
punna	merit, righteousness
purohita	king's religious advisor
puthujjana	common, uneducated worldling
rakkhaso (Skt. *rakshasa*)	demon, ogre
rupa	form, figure, image
rupa-kaya	form body
rupa-loka	form world
sahasrara (Skt.)	thousand petalled (chakra)
saka	one's own
saka-sanni-hoti	'own perception being'
sakka	Shakyan (lit. 'able')
sakya-putta	son of the Shakyan clan
salayatana	six senses
samana	recluse
samanna	conformity, generality, the state of a monastic
samatha	calm, quietude of heart
sambhogakaya (Skt.)	enjoyment or bliss body
samkhittena	dharma in brief
samma	properly, rightly, thoroughly
samudacara-tanha	craving behaviour
samudra-manthan (Skt.)	churning the ocean
sanghadisesa	meeting of the sangha
sankhara	volitional formatons, constructive activities

sankharakhandha	aggregate of karmic potentialities
sanna	sense, perception, mark, name, recognition; consciousness, perception, intellect, thought, sign
santana (samtana)	continuity, succession
sarambhajam jayapekkho	sneeringly triumphant speech
sasana	teaching, order, message, doctrine
sati	memory, awareness
satipatthana	application of awareness
sattha	science, art, lore
satthantarakappa	sword or weapon interval, period of violence
savaka	hearer, disciple
sekhiyavatta	rules of training
shakti (Skt.)	power, energy, force, divine power, cosmic energy, vital force
sidhu	alcoholic drink
sihanada	lion's roar, brave speech
sila	nature, habit, moral practice, moral code
smrti (Skt.)	what is remembered, tradition, revealed scriptures
sotapanna	one who has entered the stream of the path
subha	lucky, auspicious, pleasant, welfare, beauty
sukara-maddava	soft or mild pork
sura	deva
sura	strong distilled alcoholic beverage, anesthetic
surya-vansha (Skt.)	solar dynasty
sutta	discourse
tana	protection, refuge, shelter
tanha	craving, thirst, lust, attachment
tat (Skt.)	that
tathagata	one who has gone so, the Enlightened One
tathagata-gharba (Skt.)	tathagata embryo

tavatimsa	thirty-three
te	three, threefold
terma (Tib.)	hidden treasure
tevijja	possessing three superhuman knowledges
thera	elder
tilakkhana	three marks of existence
tiracchana	animal, beast
tiracchanavijja	base art
tirthankara	ford-maker, pathfinder
tivijja	three branches of knowledge
tumo (Tib.)	psychic heat
upadana	grasping, attachment, fuel
upadi	fuel of life
upasampada	higher monastic ordination
upatthaka	servitor, follower
upaya	means, method, device, approach
upaya-kausalya	skilful means, expedient means
uposatha	day of preparation
va (Skt.)	blow; air, wind
vaidurya (Skt.)	brought from Vidura
vajra (Skt.)	thunderbolt, diamond, adamantine
vassa	rain
vayama	exertion, striving
vedana	pain, sensation
vehapphala	very fruitful (deva realm)
veramani	abstinence
vihara	abode, dwelling place, mode of life
vijja	higher knowledge, science, wisdom
vijnana (Skt.)	supreme knowledge, supreme wisdom, supreme realization
vimamsa	experiment, investigation
vimana	mansion, heavenly palace
vinaya	self-restraint, self-discipline, self-control
vinnana	animation, consciousness
vinnana-sota	stream of consciousness
viparita	reversed, changed, wrong
vipassana	insight

viriya	vigour, energy, effort, strength
visaya	locality, region, sphere
visuddha	clean, pure, bright, stainless, sanctified (chakra)
yabyum (Tib.)	father-mother
yaksha (Skt.)	ghost
yojana	ancient Indian measure of distance
yoni	source, origin, womb, birth

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Supplement

Right View

Majjhima Nikaya 9

The Majjhima Nikaya is the second book of the Sutta Pitaka, after the Digha Nikaya. Although *Digha Nikaya* means 'long collection' and *Majjhima Nikaya* means 'medium (length) collection,' it is clear that the division into the Digha and the Majjhima is not only about length. In my English edition of the Digha, the average sutta is between twelve and thirteen pages long, whereas the average sutta in the Majjhima is seven pages long. However, eight suttas of the Majjhima Nikaya are at least as long as the average length of the suttas in the Digha Nikaya, whereas six suttas of the Digha Nikaya are shorter than the average length of the suttas in the Majjhima Nikaya. Manné and Bodhi suggest that the Digha Nikaya is an introduction to basic Buddhist thought, whereas the Majjhima is a detailed and thorough compendium of the doctrines and practices of the Buddha. Thus, Bodhi says, the Majjhima Nikaya exhibits greater philosophical depth and range.

Long Suttas of the Majjhima Nikaya

- Sammaditthi Sutta (M 9)
- Mahasihanada Sutta (M 12)
- Alagaddupama Sutta (M 22)
- Ariyapariyesana Sutta (M 26)
- Upali Sutta (M 56)
- Apannaka Sutta (M 60)
- Mahasakuludayi Sutta (M 77)
- Ratthapala Sutta (M 82)

ॐ

The standard translation of the *Sammaditthi Sutta* is 'Right View,' the first step of the Noble Eightfold Path. *Samma* means 'thoroughly,' 'properly, 'rightly,' 'in the right way,' 'as it ought to be,' 'best,' 'perfectly' (Skt. *samyac, samyak, samis*). *Ditthi* means 'view,' 'belief,' 'dogma,' 'theory,' 'speculation' (Skt. *drsti*). Thus, we might translate the title of this sutta as the 'Discourse on Perfect Wisdom.' That this sutta is named after a step of the Noble Eightfold Path is significant because it represents the point where

one enters into (lit. 'goes down into') the Path, regarded as a strict causal sequence, thus establishing one as a 'stream entrant' (*sotapanna*). Interestingly, the Buddha uses the metaphor of the stream (*sota,* 'stream,' 'flood,' 'torrent') to refer equally to the path and to samsara.

The sutta is spoken by the ex-Brahman arhant Sariputta, the follower foremost in wisdom, who the Buddha nicknames "general of the dharma," at Savatthi (Shravasti). With a population of about 900,000 individuals and 57,000 households, Shravasti was one of the six largest cities of India at that time.[391] Shravasti was a rich commercial centre and the capital of Kosala, one of the sixteen "great states," ruled by King Pasanedi, a follower of the Buddha, located near the Rapti River in present day Uttar Pradesh. The Buddha spent twenty-four or twenty-five rainy seasons in Shravasti, making this the place where he spent most of his time. Shravasti is also the reputed birthplace of the third Tirthankara of the Jain religion, with which Buddhism was in competition.

Sariputta died about three years before the Buddha. This, and the reference to "Friend," implies that this sutta was spoken by Sariputta prior to that time, probably during one of the rain retreats in Jeta's Grove, Anathapindika's Park, the location of Jetavana, one of the most famous Buddhist monasteries, located to the south of the old city. This park is famous for being bought for the sangha by Anathapindika, a wealthy householder and the chief lay follower of the Buddha, by covering the ground with millions of pieces of gold. The Buddha passed eighteen or nineteen out of forty-five rainy reasons here, more than at any other place, starting about twenty years after his Enlightenment. Therefore, this sutta may be dated most probably between when the Buddha was 55 and 78 (approximately 420 to 397 BCE) (Schumann).[392]

This is a canonical sutta, certified as such by the compilers of the Pali Canon; thus, it is recognized as *Buddhavacana,* the word of the Buddha, *but the Buddha does not speak it.* Over twenty suttas in the Majjhima Nikaya are like this, establishing the principle that *Buddhavacana* is not to

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[391] One can infer from these numbers that the average household includes fifteen or sixteen members (three generations?). Kosala itself comprises 80,000 villages and is 300 leagues (?) in extent. Kosala corresponds to present-day Avadh (Awadh).

[392] Based on Schumann's chronology, adjusted for the increasingly prevalent view that the Buddha passed circa 400 BCE.

be taken literally. The "word of the Buddha" does not refer to the actual historical speech of the Buddha, but rather to authoritative and true words and teachings, even if others speak them, because they are consistent with the historical teachings of the Buddha. This allows for continuity of development rather than strict historical reduction, the latter advocated for example by the adherents of "Original Buddhism," sometimes called neo-Theravada. One might doubt, however, whether it is proper to refer to this movement as Theravadin at all, since it rejects much (perhaps most) of the Pali Canon. Some only accept the "bits and pieces" that conform to their historical reductionist (historicist) theory. Unfortunately, NeoTheravada is as exclusive and sectarian as classical or orthodox Theravada, if not more so, and is based on the fallacy that one can identify the original teachings of the Buddha.

Sariputta introduces his topic as "one of right view," specifically, the way that a noble disciple (*sekha*) is one whose view is right, straight, perfectly confident, and true. The sutta is divided into sixteen sub-topics, including teachings on the wholesome and the unwholesome, food, the Four Noble Truths, ageing and death, birth, clinging, craving, feeling, contact, the Six-fold Base, mentality-materiality, consciousness, formations, ignorance, and the taints, all of which constitute aspects of Right View. Therefore, this sutta is a kind of catechism or compilation of basic Buddhist principles, the understanding of which is considered essential for Right View. Since each topic is identified as "another way in which a noble disciple is one of right view," it is not clear whether the comprehension of all or only one of them is necessary to attain Right View. Assuming that the English translation is accurate, the syntax also allows one to infer that these are essential insights any one of which can trigger this fundamental attainment.

We recognize in ageing and death through to ignorance the twelve causes (*nidanas*) in the chain of conditioned arising (*paticcasamuppada*), whereby primordial ignorance "sets in motion," as it were, the whole "wheel" of samsara. Of course, this statement should be understood metaphorically. The arising as a result of the "first cause" (primum mobile) of ignorance, does not occur at any particular time, samsara itself being time, but is rather inherent in "the deathless," thus arising continuously in every moment of existence and inherent in its ground. Ignorance or primary 'not-knowing' (*avijja*) is simply volition without reflexivity and thus objectified. Thus, reality creates an illusory mirage of itself as a simulacrum of

simulacra that we identify with and experience in time (samsara). Even a mirage "exists" in the sense in which it is experienced.

The sequence of terms, beginning with the wholesome and the unwholesome and ending with the taints, proceeds from the outermost to the innermost, which we may broadly identify with ethics; food; the Four Noble Truths; interdependent origination, consisting of the twelve causes/effects; and finally culminating in the taints or corruptions the cessation of which constitutes emancipation. The whole sequence is thus analogous to the Buddha's analysis of interdependent origination in "reverse order," pointing to a series of insights culminating in emancipation. This is consistent with our discussion of the ethical in the first sutta of the Digha Nikaya, in which the Buddha states that ethical considerations are relatively minor, though presumably necessary.

The Wholesome and the Unwholesome (*kusala*/*akusala*)

"Wholesome" is Bodhi's standard translation of *kusala,* which means 'clever', 'useful,' 'expert,' 'good,' 'right,' 'meritorious,' applied especially in the moral sense. It is often associated with *upaya,* 'way,' 'means,' 'expedient,' 'stratagem,' often translated as 'skilful means.' The English translation "wholesome" is perfectly sound, yet in English the word has a rather vague, moralistic, and even slightly self-righteous connotation that is inconsistent with the pragmatic ethics of the Buddha based on the Law of Karma. Buddhism identifies the precise ontological mechanism of morality in a way that Western philosophy completely fails to do. Some English synonyms that communicate this sense better are 'beneficial,' 'edifying,' 'exemplary,' 'fit,' 'hale,' 'helpful,' 'right,' 'sound' 'strengthening,' all communicating the practical sense more satisfactorily than 'wholesome.' Interestingly, another English synonym of 'wholesome' is 'nutritive,' which is the topic that immediately follows. To my ear, the word that summarizes this most neatly is 'effective,' especially since it includes the notion of the karmic cause/effect dynamic, which is the ontological basis of Buddhist ethics. Thus, to supplement Bodhi's translation, I would propose: "When, Friends, a noble disciple understands the ineffective and the root of the ineffective, the effective and the root of the effective, in that way he is one of perfect wisdom, whose view is straight, who has perfect confidence in the dharma and has arrived at this true dharma."

Note in particular that Perfect Wisdom is not attained by faith, though the lowest stage of personal progress is identified as that of the 'faith

follower,' which is immediately followed by 'dharma follower.' Both of these are prior to the path proper. Faith may be an essential first step, but in itself is not sufficient to attain the path. Rather, Buddhist confidence is *pasada,* 'clearness,' 'brightness,' 'purity,' 'visibility,' 'joy,' 'satisfaction,' 'happy' or 'good mind,' 'virtue,' 'faith.' The only way to arrive at this stage is through right view, i.e., ratiocination. Anything else is just dreaming. In this case, the "way" that leads to Perfect Wisdom is identified with the proper comprehension of the ethical in its relation to the Law of Karma.

The Buddha identifies the unwholesome actions beginning with the first four precepts of pansil—not killing; not taking what is not given (generally identified with stealing but somewhat more extensive); "misconduct in sensual pleasures" (often referred to as sexual misconduct, especially adultery); and false, malicious, and harsh speech and gossip. These four ethical precepts are referred to elsewhere as the Fourfold Restraint. As I have discussed, the Fourfold Restraint refers to the original four precepts of pansil that the Buddha advocates for the first eight years of his career, excluding drinking alcoholic beverages, which he did not prohibit until a bhikku embarrasses the sangha by becoming drunk in public, whereupon the Buddha prohibits drinking for monastics and also forbids drinkers from becoming monastics. One might speculate that the absence of any reference to drinking here places this sutta during the first eight years of the Buddha's career. However, this is unlikely given the location, discussed above, which suggests that the sutta was delivered at least twelve years later. In addition, there are other examples of later suttas where the fourfold form of Pansil is given. In any case, the list of ineffective practices adds covetousness, anger, and wrong view as further ineffective actions.

The Buddha identifies the root or cause of ineffective actions with greed, hatred, and delusion. Similarly, he identifies effective action with abstention from the ineffective actions already cited, and the root cause of effectiveness with the absence of greed, hatred, and delusion. This emphasis on renunciation or abstinence, instead of their positive correlates, is typical of the Pali Canon, which tends to present ethics in negative rather than in positive terms, consistent with its samsaric frame of reference, which is of course the frame of reference of its hearers.

The Buddha says that understanding itself leads to the abandonment or renunciation of the karmic predispositions (*sankharas*) to lust, aversion, ego, and ignorance, the root or "first cause" of interdependent origination.

This results in the "arousing" of "true knowledge...here and now." Thus, Perfect Wisdom or Right View is itself identified with the end of angst (*dukkha*) and emancipation itself. How is this knowledge or wisdom "aroused"? It seems to be through the cultivation of wisdom itself. I have emphasized how the Pali Canon identifies awakening, emancipation, illumination, enlightenment—all cognate terms—with the cultivation and attainment of Perfect Wisdom. Therefore, Perfect Wisdom may be distinguished from ethics and meditation, which are merely subordinate methods or "skilful means." The Buddha does say, however, that a minimum of one week of meditation is necessary to attain emancipation following the opening of the Dharma Eye, which is a transmission clearly not conferred by meditation itself. Moreover, "true knowledge" is not based on past or future. It occurs in the present moment, the "here and now." Thus, "true knowledge" is the radical insight into the essential nature or "phenomenology" of instantaneity, the present moment singularity that alone is real, as against time, which posits a succession of moments and is the root of samsara/karma.

This concludes our discussion of the wholesome and the unwholesome.

Food (*ahara*)

PED has 'feeding,' 'support,' 'food,' 'nutriment,' literally 'taking up or on to [sic] oneself.' "You are what you eat." Similarly, the original Vedic insight is that "life eats life." We construct our existence by objectifying and then appropriating the existence of others. Similarly, in the Digha Nikaya higher-dimensional luminous beings discover the pleasure of ingesting lower vibrational energy, what we term the "earth-plane," and become the spiritual ancestors of humans. In the European Middle Ages, the Church taught and people believed that the earth was the centre of the universe. The authorities, whose power depended on the belief in geocentricity, reviled anyone who denied the doctrine of geocentricity, Similarly, today we have simply transposed "earth" to matter and declared that the matter that we experience with our senses, especially the body, is the "centre of the universe," and anyone who denies the doctrine of egocentricity is reviled, because the power of the corporations depends on egocentricity. In the Buddhist world-view, the earth or matter is merely a range of energy-information-vibration, with frequencies above and below ours invisible to us due to the limited sensitivity of our senses—including the body, which

is itself nothing more or less than the sum of the vibratory frequencies of the subatomic "particles" of which it is composed.

Food is that which sustains the body and the senses in its current configuration. One literally is what one eats. Sariputta identifies four types of food:

1. Physical food, gross or subtle;
2. Contact;
3. Mental volition; and
4. Consciousness (*vinnana*).

Each of these types of food constructs four "dimensions" of our vibrational configuration. Physical food constructs the physical body. Contact constructs the environment. Mental volition constructs the karmic complex that creates our identity. Finally, consciousness gives life to the whole project. This construction is the "baited hook" that involves and perpetuates involvement in the samsaric experiential net.

It follows from the foregoing that if one modifies any or all of these "foods," one will modify one's experience of samsara, including, since samsara itself is essentially transitory and illusory, complete emancipation, attained through the total cessation of food. "Purification comes about through food."[393] Thus, greed, aversion, egoity, and ignorance are again transcended by arousing true knowledge or "gnosis" in the experience of the singular instantaneity of "now," which is the simple act of reflexivity. This attainment is also identified with Perfect Wisdom.

Before leaping to the conclusion that the Buddha is advocating starving oneself to death, consider the range of meanings of *ahara.* Although gross physical food is included, four other aspects of "food," mental in whole or in part, viz., subtle physical food, contact, mental volition, and consciousness, are also referred to. The cessation of contact, mental volition, and consciousness clearly refers to the experience of meditation. The Buddha says that the way leading to the cessation of food is the Path.

Many professional meditators also reduce their food intake to a functional minimum as part of their practice, and there are possibly apocryphal stories and legends of great saints, like Milarepa, who subsisted on little or no food. Although the Buddha clearly teaches that food should be reduced to a healthy minimum, he forbids the extremes of killing and the

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[393] M 12, 52.

practice of vegetarianism by monastics. Sex is doubtless also a form of food, perhaps involving all four types.

The singular importance of food in the Buddhist scheme recalls the original food of the gods, amrita, identified with the soma sacrifice in the Vedic tradition. This food also transforms those who consume it into a being of the same energy configuration as the food they consume. Similarly, in the fairy faith of the ancient Celts a person who is kidnapped by the fairy folk must not eat their food, or must retain some human food, or they will disappear from the human into the fairy realm forever. Other traditions also speak of divine food, such as the manna of the Hebrews. Examples abound.

This concludes our discussion of food.

The Four Noble Truths

Sariputta continues in this vein with respect to the Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths are often identified with Right View. However, in this account Sariputta starts with ethics and food before proceeding to the Four Truths, which are still relatively "outward" or exoteric in the sequence. The Four Noble Truths appear as a way leading to the Eightfold Path that is an alternative to food, which also leads to the Path. In fact, clinging-craving, the cause of suffering, with its three objects of sensual pleasures, being, and non-being, seems to involve all of contact-volition-consciousness. We will not discuss the Five Aggregates Affected by Clinging in the context of interdependent origination, since they are not itemized here.

This concludes our discussion of the Four Noble Truths.

Interdependent Origination (*paticcasamuppada*)

The next twelve "ways" associated with Right View constitute the structure commonly called interdependent origination. The elements of this structure consist of a series of 'causes' (*nidanas*), each of which is the effect of the one before it and the cause of the one after it in their natural (entropic) order. Thus, this structure exhibits the operation of the Law of Karma in Time. The order in which they are presented in the sutta is their reverse (analytical) order, which also corresponds to the order of attainment, starting with what is immediately present, i.e., ageing and death, and proceeding through the same process of analysis and introspection that the Buddha followed. In this way, the Buddha begins with what we

know, with what is immediately intuitively apprehended, much as in the phenomenology of Husserl but completely contrary to the metaphysical cosmological orientation of the ancient Vedic tradition. In this way, the Buddha anticipates modern philosophy by over two thousand years.

The twelve *nidanas* in Bodhi's translation with their Pali equivalents are:

1. Ageing and Death (*jaramarana*);
2. Birth (*jati*);
3. Being (*bhava*);
4. Clinging (*upadana*);
5. Craving (*tanha*);
6. **Feeling (*vedana*);**
7. *Contact (phassa);*
8. *The Sixfold Base (salayatana);*
9. **Mentality-Materiality (*namarupa*);**
10. **Consciousness (*vinnana*);**
11. **Formations (*sankhara*);** and
12. Ignorance (*avijja*).

Implicit in this structure one can discern another, fivefold structure, called the Aggregates of Clinging, which are identified with suffering in the Four Noble Truths: form (*rupa*), feeling (*vedana*), perception (*sanna*), vvolitional formations (*sankhara*), and consciousness (*vinnana*). Perception is somewhere between contact and the six senses. The two structures are clearly closely related.

Thus, **the original and originating primordial state is the complete absence of information, yet dynamic and so active or kinetic. In other Pali suttas, we learn of principles higher than these: proliferation, differentiation, the mind-stream, the clear light, and the trans-dual void or emptiness of reality itself, developed further in the Mahayana.**

If I had to explain the ultimate metaphysical view of the Buddha, I would have to say that it is **unconscious sentience as the primordial reality seeking and thereby self-creating through volitional intention its own meaning through the infinite, beginningless differentiation, proliferation, and objectification of information in an endless illusory mirage of its own becoming.** This description is strikingly similar to certain theories of modern science, beginning with Einstein

right up to digital or information physics.[394] This primary scenario gives rise to everything we know as the dharma, starting with the essential unsatisfactoriness or angst of existence, and culminating in the realization of reflexivity (*sati,* 'awareness,' 'attention').

This process works itself out through three "kinds of being," in Bodhi's translation, which may also be conceptualized as vertical planes or dimensions of existence: 'sense-sphere being,' characterized by the perception of "matter"; 'fine-material being,' characterized by the perception of energetic patterns; and non-local, 'immaterial being,' which is characterized by information only. The fine-material world is the realm of the devas, luminous aerial beings that also appear in our own sense-sphere, which includes planes "higher" or more subtle than the plane of nature inhabited by humans, animals, earthbound devas, ghosts, and also by some denizens of the realm of the Four Great Kings and perhaps even asuras. If Buddhism says anything about our world, it is that it is filled with diverse forms of life, even beyond what we see or know.

Clinging includes clinging to sensual pleasures, views, rules, observances, and the self or soul-doctrine that arises out of egoity. The Pali word *upadana* actually refers to fuel, the material substratum that keeps a process alive (or alight). This is the fuel that is "burnt out" in *nibbana,* literally 'gone out.' Clinging to views and observances includes vain speculations, heresies, and sectarianism, all referred to elsewhere in the Pali Canon, but in essence attachment to views lies in the fanaticism, intolerance, and closed-mindedness with which such views are defended.

The Pali word *atta* is literally 'breath.' It is described in the Upanishads as a small creature, in shape like a person, dwelling in the heart. By inference, then, the Buddhist view of the self rejects the ego identification with any identifiable object or quality, thus hypostasizing the mind-stream in terms of samsaric phenomena. This is not the same thing as saying that the self does not exist. Clearly, a self exists—the point is not that we do not exist—an absurd self-contradiction—but rather that we do not exist in any of the forms in which we think we do, including the religious notion of a substantial soul that goes to heaven and enjoys a life of eternal bliss

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[394] For a fascinating insight into what this might mean for the theory of reality see Jacques Vallée, *Messengers of Deception* (1979; rpt. Brisbane: Daily Grail, 2008), pp. 237–45.

after death. The Buddha refers to the self as often as he denies its existence. When the Buddha attains enlightenment, he does not cease to exist, neither does the world become enlightened. The Pali Canon refers to the mind-stream; clearly, the Buddha identifies the goal of *nibbana* in the Pali Canon as "the deathless," a term for amrita that also means 'immortality.'

Six *nidanas*—craving, feeling, contact, the sixfold base, mentality-materiality, and consciousness—are all classified in terms of the six senses—sight, sound, smell, taste, tactility, and mind. Note also that the appearance of sensory consciousness precedes, rather than follows, the development of the sense organs or "bases." Mentality-materiality includes the six senses by including contact, the seventh *nidana,* in its list of feeling, perception, volition, contact, and attention, which make up the psychic polarity of *namarupa.* These five qualities closely correspond to the Five Aggregates. Elsewhere in the Pali Canon, *namarupa* is identified with the Five Aggregates.[395] One can see that the *nidanas* are not mutually exclusive. They interpenetrate. They overlap. Aspects of each are reflected in the others. The *nidanas* are less like a linear sequence than a holographic or fractal, in which every part is intervolved with every other part.

The karmic potentialities (*sankharas*) arise out of volitional intention, rooted in attachment, and create complex concatenations of causes and effects that work themselves out collectively in the quality of experience depending on the availability or non-availability of conditions conducive to their appearance. There is no cause without an effect, and no effect without a cause. Therefore, every cause must result in an effect, in infinite time, and the sum of those causes that have not yet resulted in an effect constitutes the complex of the karmic potentialities. These manifest through body as actions, speech as language, and mind as intentions, a familiar threefold formula.

This concludes our discussion of interdependent origination.

The Taints (*asavas*)

Asavas are the outflowings and inflowings that intoxicate and toxify the mind. The taints are a function of ignorance. That is, they represent a cognitive dysfunction. If ignorance ceases, then so do the taints. Since ignorance is destroyed by wisdom, so are the taints. Translators generally

[395] See PED, s.v. *Nama.*

ignore the perplexing etymology and simply translate the asavas as 'taints,' 'corruptions,' or 'defilements,' freedom from which constitutes emancipation. The *asavas* referred to are sensuality, becoming, and ignorance or 'not knowing.' The reference to 'inflowings' and 'outflowings' suggests how the senses "flow out" into the objects that they project, from which they receive in return information concerning the sensory patterns that they perceive and thus create the objective sensory experience that arises out of this dyadic interactivity. The taints are the hiss of this process. Sensuality results from the interactivity of pleasure and pain. Becoming results from the interactivity of past and future, birth and death. Ignorance results from the interactivity of not-knowing and volition.

This concludes our discussion of the taints.

Conclusion

Right View is the first step in the Noble Eightfold Path. Thus, it is the point of entry into the path itself, also called the stream. Right View is characterized by truth and engenders perfect confidence. According to the sutta, one has Right View in sixteen "ways." These ways correspond to the essential insights that constitute Right View, and the means by which it can be realized. Thus, as with the four grades of stream entry, etc., there are two phases, the path and the fruit. These ways, proceeding in order from the outermost to the innermost, include realization through understanding the Law of Karma, food, the Four Noble Truths, interdependent origination, and the taints. Therefore, the cultivation of wisdom or understanding is the primary means of entry to the path, and the essential salvific principle.

The Greater Lion's Roar

Majjhima Nikaya 12

The Buddha is living outside Vesali in a grove to the west of the city. Vesali was the capital of the Licchavi tribe in the Vajjian Confederacy, which the Buddha took as a model for the organization of the sangha. Today it is an archaeological site in Bihar state. It was the birthplace of Mahavira, the leader of the Jains during the Buddha's lifetime. It is also the location where the Buddha went to be trained in meditation by Ramaputra and Alara Kalama. He preached his final sermon here, and the Second Buddhist Council was held here. At the time of the Buddha, Vesali was large, rich, prosperous, and populous, with abundant food. It was a beautiful city, with 7,707 parks and 7,707 lotus ponds, inhabited by 7,707 rajahs. This is the home of the royal courtesan and famous dancer, Amrapali, who was a great patron of the city and a Buddhist.

The date of this sutta is about the same time as the Mahaparinibbana Sutta (D 16), i.e., just before the Buddha's passing at the age of 80, since the Buddha says that he is "now old, aged, burdened with years, advanced in life and come to the last stage: my years have turned eighty."[396] However, there is some ambiguity about the date, since the text states that during the course of the sutta the Buddha is being fanned by Nagasamala, a task usually reserved for the Buddha's personal attendant. Nagasamala was the personal attendant of the Buddha during the first twenty years of the Buddha's career. However, it is possible that Nagasamala is still a bhikku though no longer the Buddha's attendant at the end of his life. Nagasamala himself cannot not have been much less than 50 at this time if that is true.

The Licchavi Sunakkhatta left the sangha because the Buddha did not perform any miracles or explain to him the beginning of things.[397] Subsequently, he went to the Vesali Assembly and denied that the Buddha had attained any superhuman states, distinction in knowledge, or vision worthy of an arhant. He accused the Buddha of being a rationalist intellectual who was merely following out his own arguments not based on realization or any higher attainments. He asserted that the cessation of suffering is

[396] M 12.62.
[397] D 24.

inferior to the attainment of psychic powers. In a sense, Sunakkhatta's criticism is true; the Buddha did rationalize Brahmanism and sought to identify a rational, realistic teaching within the Vedic tradition that had been overgrown by mythical concepts and superstitious beliefs, and he did teach the cessation of suffering, not psychic powers, as the primary or ultimate goal.

At the same time that Sunakkhatta is addressing the Licchavis, Sariputta, the disciple foremost in wisdom, is visiting Vesali on alms round and hears Sunakkhatta's speech, which he tells to the Buddha on his return to the grove where they are staying. The Buddha shrugs off Sunakkhatta's comments as inspired by anger and points out that the criticism that the Buddha teaches the way to the cessation of suffering is actually a compliment. The rest of the sutta rebuts Sunakkhatta's criticism of the Buddha, including the Ten Powers of a Tathagata, Four Kinds of Intrepidity, Eight Assemblies, Four Kinds of Generation, Five Destinations and Nibbana, and the Bodhisattva's Austerities.

The Buddha says that Sunakkhatta will never acknowledge the Buddha's enlightenment or his psychic powers, consisting of self-multiplication, invisibility, passing through matter, and levitation.

The meaning of the title of this sutta is the discourse by which the Wheel of Dharma is set rolling, i.e., the dharma age is inaugurated. The dharma wheel appears in the Digha Nikaya, in the story of Mahasuddassana (D 17), to whom it appeared as a UFO and through which he conquered his neighbours and established a peaceable dharma kingdom. The sutta enumerates ten powers of a tathagata by which the Buddha's primogeniture is established:

1. Understanding what is possible and impossible;
2. Understanding karma;
3. Understanding the Five Destinations (devas, humans, animals, ghosts, and hell beings);
4. Understanding the elements of the world;
5. Understanding the inclinations of beings;
6. Understanding the Five Faculties (faith, energy, awareness, concentration, wisdom);
7. Understanding the elements of the path;
8. Understanding rebirth;
9. Understanding karma, called the Divine Eye; and

10. Understanding the destruction of the taints (sensuality, becoming, false views, and ignorance) by the cultivation of wisdom.

In accordance with the doctrine of the Power of Truth, these understandings are described as "powers." The Buddha declares that anyone who denies the attainment of the Tathagata will be reborn in a hellish state. The Buddhist hells, which are rather kinds of purgatories from which rebirth becomes possible once the negative karma has been destroyed through suffering. must be distinguished from the hell of the Abrahamic traditions. The Buddha declares that he is fully enlightened and that he has destroyed the taints, that those things that he has declared to be obstructions (sensuality, anger, sloth-torpor, restlessness-worry, and uncertainty) are obstructions, and that his dharma leads to the cessation of suffering.

The Buddha further declares that he is at home in the assemblies of nobles, Brahmans, householders, recluses, devas of the realm of the Four Great Kings, devas of the realm of the Thirty-Three, Mara's retinue, and devas of the Brahma realm.

The Buddha describes the four kinds of rebirths: egg-born, womb-born, moisture-born, and spontaneously generated, the latter referring to devas. The most interesting thing about this passage is that the Buddha identifies "certain human beings," as well as devas, hell beings, and some beings of the lower worlds, as spontaneously born.

In addition, he identifies five types of rebirth: as hell beings, animals, ghosts, people, and devas. Later Buddhist tradition added the anti-gods to this list. Finally, he identifies nirvana, which is attained by individuals for themselves through gnosis in the present moment, the "now," because of mental cultivation and the realization of wisdom by which the taints are destroyed.

The Buddha declares that he knows the behaviours that lead to rebirth in each of these states. In a memorable simile, he compares the experience of nirvana to dallying in a dense wood adjacent to a cool pond of good water after bathing and slaking one's thirst on a hot day. Far from describing nirvana as an affectively neutral state, the Buddha describes nirvana as "extremely pleasant."

The Buddha declares that he recalls practicing extreme asceticism, coarseness, scrupulousness, and seclusion. The Buddha describes the ascetic practices of northeast India of his time, including the memorable

passage, "I would make my bed in a charnel ground with the bones of the dead for a pillow."[398]

Interestingly, the Buddha refers specifically to the "eight day interval of frost," around late December-early January, during which, he says, he dwelled out of doors. We have already discussed the question of how cold winter gets in northeast India, since it seems that the Buddha died in late winter, in his eightieth year.

This sutta also preserves a tradition that we find elsewhere in the Pali Canon, especially in the Theragatha and the Therigatha, whereby a realized person utters a spontaneous or ecstatic verse as an expression of their realization. This tradition is especially important in Tibet as well as Ch'an/Zen Buddhism, where such poems take the form of enigmatic riddles, called koans.

The statement that "purification comes about through food" is also found elsewhere in the Pali Canon. Food is an important concept in the canon, but here it refers to self-starvation, a practice that the Buddha repudiates. Thus, he says, "by such conduct, by such practice, by such performance of austerities, I did not attain any superhuman states, any distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones."[399] The reason that the Buddha gives for this is telling: "Why was that? Because I did not attain that noble wisdom which when attained is noble and emancipating and leads the one who practises in accordance with it to the complete destruction of suffering."[400] That is, the essential salvific principle is not asceticism or even meditation but Wisdom, through which alone emancipation is attained and suffering completely destroyed. This point subsequently became the basis of the Prajnaparamita tradition of the Mahayana at about the same time that the Pali Canon was first written down. Neither morality nor even meditation is the essential salvific principle, but Wisdom, the cure for ignorance or not-knowing, wins emancipation.

The Buddha repudiates the notion, characteristic of the Ajivikas, a popular sect at the time, that purification comes about through the round of rebirths. That is to say, that the soul passes through a predetermined series of rebirths in which it experiences every possible state after which it

[398] M 12.51.
[399] M 12.56.
[400] Ibid.

is automatically emancipated. This process takes incalculable eons to complete. However, the Buddha says, he experienced every possible rebirth except in the Five Pure Abodes, from which rebirth in the human realm is impossible. Thus, once again the Buddha distinguishes his attainment from that of the arhants, who are reborn in the Five Pure Abodes if they have not extirpated every vestige of attachment. Because a bodhisattva vows to be reborn as a person before they become a buddha, this is impossible for them. Similarly, the Buddha has experienced every kind of abode, sacrifice, and fire ceremony.

Finally, the Buddha declares that the lucidity of his wisdom is unimpaired by age, despite the fact that he is 80. Thus, he declares himself to fulfil all the requisites of buddhahood.

Nagasamala declares that this sutta makes his body hairs stand up. Hence, the Buddha declares that he may remember the sutta as "the Hair-Raising Discourse," alluding to the fact that the Buddha's discourses are being memorized by his followers.

The Water Snake Simile

Majjhima Nikaya 22

The Buddha is living in Jeta's Grove in Anathapindika's Park. Savatthi or Shravasti was the capital of Kosala and one of the six largest cities of India at the time of the Buddha. Anathapindika is a wealthy householder and the chief lay disciple of the Buddha.

The sutta begins by considering the problem of heresy. Presumably, as the sangha expanded in size and extent this must have been a growing problem, especially after the Buddha's passing, but even before the Buddha's *parinibbana* there was concern about how best to preserve the dharma, and there is evidence of such thinking in the canon.

In this case, a monastic, Arittha, is associated with the wrong or "pernicious" view that the obstructions or hindrances are not actually obstructions or hindrances. Arittha is "formerly of the vulture killers," which I am guessing is probably a low ranking sub-caste of the shudra or worker caste, i.e., he is what we could call lower middle class. The Five Hindrances are sensory desire, anger, sloth-torpor, restlessness-worry, and doubt. This view is similar to arguments made today that consumption, competition, and disbelief are actually good things—greed is good, the virtue of selfishness, the end justifies the means, etc. Here again the Law of Karma is central—like creates like. The opposite view, that one can create one state of affairs by appealing to its opposite, is the essence of nihilism.

Note that Arittha is not rejecting the *Buddhadharma*—he is a monastic after all—but rather he is inferring this conclusion from his (mis)understanding of the dharma. This is of course the definition of heresy.

Several monastics hear about this and go to Arittha, challenging his doctrine by means of a variety of similes that indicate the negative character of the obstructions. Arittha, however, is not convinced. The monastics go to the Buddha to report Arittha's heresy to him. The Buddha calls a monastic to summon Arittha. Arittha comes as requested and tells the Buddha that his heresy that the obstructions are not hindrances is his understanding of the Buddha's dharma. The implication, also identified by Bodhi, is that Arittha is advocating a dharma of sensual pleasure, much along the lines advocated by some New Age gurus today, such as Aleister Crowley, Osho, Adi Da, etc.

Bodhi tells us that the Vinaya says that the sangha suspended Arittha and defined the offence of refusing to give up a wrong view after repeated admonitions by others based on Arittha's obstinacy.

The Buddha asks the monastics if Arittha has "kindled even a spark of wisdom in this Dhamma and Discipline?"[401] The monastics declare that he has not, and that his view is heretical, whereupon Arittha becomes dejected and sullen. Finally, the Buddha declares the principle, which seems to have been a particular point of dissension in the sangha—"Bhikkus, that one can engage in sensual pleasure without sensual desire, without perception of sensual desire, without thoughts of sensual desire—that is impossible."[402] Once a man came to me, who identified himself as a Buddhist, and asked me to teach him how to meditate so that he could have sex with women without any attachment or feelings for them that could cause him to suffer. I imagine that this kind of perversion of right view is what Arittha engaged in. In other words, emancipation and sensuality are mutually incompatible because without craving (the definition of emancipation) there can be no sensual desire and thus no sensual pleasure.

The sutta includes an interesting classification of the dharma into discourses, stanzas, expositions, verses, exclamations, sayings, birth stories, marvels, and answers to questions, clearly alluding to an intermediate stage of development of the oral tradition in which the dharma was identified with various classes of compositions but prior to the dissimilar organization of the canon that we have today.

The Buddha implies that Arittha is an intellectual who has been led astray by his own thinking. The Buddha contrasts this sophistical way of thinking, which he associates with criticizing others and winning in debates—a kind of thinking popular in many universities today, especially in North America—with examining the meaning of the teachings with wisdom. Without wisdom, they fail to gain a "reflective acceptance" of the teachings, In other words, Arittha was seduced by his own cleverness.

The Buddha compares this wrong way of grasping the dharma with grasping a snake by its tail, which turns about and bites one. Similarly, misapprehending the dharma creates much demerit. The simile of the snake is like consciousness itself—subtle, lively, hard to pin down, and

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[401] M 22.7.
[402] M 22.9,

easy to lead to a bad result. On the other hand, a snake is properly grasped with a cleft stick. This is the right way of grasping the dharma.

The Buddha's simile suggests the process of meditation: "Suppose a man needing a snake, seeking a snake, wandering in search of a snake, saw a large snake and caught it rightly with a cleft stick and having done so, grasped it rightly by the neck. Then although the snake might wrap its coils round his hand or his arm or his limbs, still he would not come to death or deadly suffering because of that."[403] The snake is a universal symbol of volatility and psychic energy, including libido or sexual energy and kundalini shakti that lies coiled and dormant as the ecstatic potential of consciousness, the buddha nature or *tathagatagarbha*. The cleft stick is samadhi. "Grasping" consciousness in this way confers immortality or "deathlessness."

The purpose of the dharma, the Buddha says, is not to win debates but to cross over the flood of samsara through dispassion. Once samsara is overcome, dharma itself can be discarded, rather than continuing to engage in vain intellectual inquisition. However, in order to discard the dharma it must first be constructed and used before it can be discarded. The point then is that the construction of dharma, which is a necessary means, is transcended by realization.

The Buddha contrasts his doctrine of absolute dispassion, including attachment to high and beneficial states, with Arittha's attempt to admit sensuality through the back door of dharma disputation. "Bhikkhus, when you know the Dhamma to be similar to a raft, you should abandon even good states, how much more bad states."[404] The ultimate disposition is perfect dispassion, beyond morality.

The Buddha criticizes both the doctrine of self (atman) and the doctrine of non-self (annihilation) as equally false, with regard to matter, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness (the Five Aggregates), ranging from possessiveness and territoriality (the subject of another discourse on interdependent origination), to the soul theory, including the contemplation of non-existence, which creates the agitation of fear and craving. However, one who understands these theories for what they are, i.e.,

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[403] M 22.11.
[404] M 22.14.

illusions or delusions, is not agitated by them. This is my reading of this difficult section, which Bodhi calls "Standpoint for Views."

The Buddha explains that there are two kinds of agitation about nothing. Externally, one frets over the loss or non-possession of an illusory object. Internally, one frets over the prospect of personal annihilation. The latter agitation is specifically aroused (says the Buddha) in one who thinks that the dharma means that the self is annihilated in nirvana, implying that this is wrong view.

The solution to both types of agitation is to hear "the Dhamma for the elimination of all standpoints, decisions, obsessions, adherences and underlying tendencies, for the stilling of all formations, for the relinquishing of all attachments, for the destruction of craving for dispassion, for cessation, for Nibbana."[405] The Buddha specifically says that such a follower of the dharma does not "think" that they are to be annihilated. Assuming that Nanamoli and Bodhi's translation of the Pali is accurate, the use of the word "think" rather than "feel" or "fear" is significant. He realizes non-self-identity as a matter of knowledge, not belief.

Next, the Buddha asks the monastics whether they are aware of anything existent that is permanent, everlasting, eternal, changeless, and enduring; anything in the world that does not arouse angst in anyone who clings to it as a property of a self or a support, recapitulating the Three Characteristics of Existence—transience, non-self-identity, and angst.

The Buddha goes on to criticize the classic Upanishadic axiom of the unity of Brahman and Atman; this is a core precept of Hinduism. This axiom contradicts two fundamental Buddhist precepts: first, the essential angst of the world (Brahman) and second, non-self-identity (*anatta*). The Buddha ridicules the notion of an "eternal self" (i.e., soul), yet he posits Deathlessness as the goal of emancipation. Rather, the Buddha instructs his followers to not identify the self with anything at all, whether physical (material) or psychological (mental). The cultivation of this state progresses from disenchantment through dispassion to liberation and non-rebirth.

Arahant is variously explained as 'one who is worthy' or 'foe destroyer.' The term is not unique to Buddhism. Generally, it is used to refer to an advanced spiritual aspirant, but not a buddha. Nonetheless, the evidence

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[405] M 22.20.

of the Pali Canon is that the Buddha teaches the path of the arhant to his followers, along with at least two other paths—the path to deva rebirth and the similar but more specialized path to Union with Brahma—as well as the renowned "84,000 techniques" of spiritual practice. In other words, the Buddha's teachings are diverse and adapted to his audience. Buddhism is essentially a meta-theory of religion that both includes and transcends religion as such. It is interesting that the Buddha chose to use this familiar pan-Indian term, which also describes the goal of the *samana* movement in general, including the Jains, rather than some more specialized term (e.g., *tathagata,* which he mostly uses for himself). The emphasis throughout the Pali Canon on the path of the arhant is unsurprising considering that it is the monastics who preserved the canon, i.e., precisely those who were committed to this path. Nonetheless, the evidence of the Pali Canon is that the Buddha teaches the path of the arhant to the monastics.

The Eighteen Schools differ in their view of the spiritual perfection of the arhants, though all schools agree that an arhant is emancipated as a consequence of perfecting dispassion, thus breaking the chain of interdependent origination by "reversing" the 'cause' (*nidana*) of craving. Some schools held to the generally accepted view that an arhant is an advanced spiritual aspirant but not necessarily a buddha. We might say that an arhant is an adept but not a master. Thus, while the Buddha is an arhant, this does not mean that an arhant is necessarily a buddha, and there is evidence in the Pali Canon to support this view. At least eight schools held this view. The alternate view that the arhants are perfected beings in every sense, and in particular in terms of the development of their wisdom, and are therefore infallible, is held today by the so-called Theravada, which is the only surviving "early" school. Thus, this view has erroneously become identified with the Eighteen Schools themselves. If arhants are not perfected beings, then there must be another path, a path that leads to buddhahood, the path of the Buddha himself, and we find this path described in the Pali Canon as the path of the bodhisattva.

The Buddha gives a number of similes to express the things that they have completely abandoned or renounced, specifically, ignorance, rebirth, craving, and the five lower fetters (i.e., self-identity, doubt, attachment to rites and rituals, sensual desire or lust, and anger). Self-identity-view is repeated. Thus, the Buddha says of an arhant that "when the god with Indra, with Brahma, and with Pajapati [lit. 'lord of creation'] seek a bhikkhu who is thus liberated in mind, they do not find anything of which they

could say: 'The consciousness of one thus gone (*tathagata*) is supported by this.' Why is that? One thus gone, I say, is untraceable here and now."[406]

Note the Buddha's use of the word, *tathagata,* 'thus gone.' Usually this word is reserved for the Buddha alone, but occasionally it is used with reference to the arhant, just as "arhant" is used with reference to the Buddha. Both are emancipated beings. However, to infer from this that the Buddha and the arhant are identical, as some so-called modern or progressive Buddhists might have it, is overreaching and untenable, not only canonically, but in terms of fundamental logic as well, for if the Buddha is simply another arhant, then the doctrine of the primogeniture of the Buddha disappears. According to this view, we should regard all arhants equally. This denial of the primogeniture of the Buddha is entirely non-canonical.

The consciousness of the arhant is "untraceable." The commentaries interpret this word to mean that the arhant has no self-identity and that his "insight-path-fruition mind" is not discernible within samsara, referring of course to the mind-stream (*santana*).

One of the big misunderstandings of Buddhism is the accusation that Buddhism is a sort of nihilism, advocating the extinction (*nibbana*) of the self (*atta*). The samsaric focus of the Pali Canon reinforces this wrong view. However, here the Buddha declares this view to be a mistake: "So saying, bhikkhus, so proclaiming, I have been baselessly, vainly, falsely, and wrongly misrepresented by some recluses and brahmins thus: 'The recluse Gotama is one who leads astray; he teaches the annihilation, the destruction, the extermination of an existing being.'"[407] Rather, the Buddha says, "what I teach is suffering and the cessation of suffering."[408] Bodhi comments: "Nibbana, the cessation of suffering, is not the annihilation of a being but the termination of that same unsatisfactory process."[409] In other words, nirvana is the annihilation of an illusion. The annihilation of illusion is not nihilism, but rather the realization of the relative nature of existence. By realizing the relative nature of the relative, one realizes the absolute nature of the absolute. This is the enlightened perspective.

However, the Buddha says of himself as Tathagata that he is indifferent as to whether others abuse, revile, scold, and harass him or honour,

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[406] M 22.36.
[407] M 22.37.
[408] M 22.38.
[409] *Middle Length Discourses,* p. 1210, n. 268.

respect, revere, or venerate him, since there is no ego to experience either annoyance, bitterness, or dejection or delight, joy, or elation "of the heart." The reference to the heart may be a double entendre since, besides being the centre of emotion, it is also the traditional centre of the *atta,* the self. Therefore, says the Buddha, the monastics should feel neither annoyance nor delight because of others, reiterating a statement made in the first sutta of the Digha Nikaya, the rahmajala Sutta.

Therefore, says the Buddha, since there is no self to possess, and no object to be possessed, abandon this process, which is doubly illusory; it was never yours in the first place. The construction parallels the second precept—taking what is not given. Thus, one should abandon attachment to material form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness—the Five Aggregates of self or psyche. Let it be.

This dharma that the Buddha proclaims is, he says, clear, open, evident, and "free of patchwork" (synthetic?). The commentary explains this idiom as meaning that the dharma is not fragmentary, outmoded, or deceptive in any way. The Buddha says that the arhants who have destroyed the taints are completely liberated. Note that the Buddha specifically identifies the salvific principle with "final knowledge," once again confirming that the Pali Canon clearly teaches that wisdom is the essential salvific principle.

Moreover, those monastics who abandon the five lower fetters are reborn in the Pure Abodes, the highest planes of the Form world of samsara, corresponding to the attainment of the fourth jhana, whence they will attain final nirvana without ever being reborn in a lower world.

Those monastics that abandon the three lower fetters (self-view, doubt, attachment to rites and rituals) and attenuated lust, hatred, and delusion are reborn as a person once more only, whence they will attain arhantship. Thus, it is possible to attain liberation either from the Pure Abodes or from the human world. Those monastics that abandon the three lower fetters are stream entrants, who are on the path that leads to liberation.

Similarly, the Buddha identifies two subordinate classes of aspirant, dharma followers and faith followers, who are also on the path to enlightenment. Bodhi notes that the liberation of dharma followers is called "attained to view." The liberation of faith followers is called "liberated by faith." However, it is important to note that according to the Kitagiri Sutta (M 70) only those liberated both ways or liberated by wisdom are completely liberated, with nothing left to do. All the other types, including one

liberated by faith, still have work to do, and thus are liberated (awakened?), but not enlightened. The other types of those who still have work to do are the body witness, one attained to view, a dharma follower, and a faith follower. The body witness, not discussed in sutta 22, seems to refer to an aspirant who has experienced awareness of the body and the immaterial (i.e., fifth through eighth) jhanas.

Finally, those monastics who have a certain degree of faith and love for the Buddha are reborn in a deva world. This seems to be the lowest level of Buddhist attainment. Rebirth in a deva world may result in a long period of great happiness and other perks, including beauty, power, and wisdom, but eventually it seems that all devas (excluding those born in the Pure Abodes) are reborn in a lower state. Nevertheless, it is clear that the Buddha includes the conventional religious aspiration to "heaven" in his teachings, but as an inferior path not leading to final emancipation (*parinibbana*). Since the Buddha clearly includes inferior paths and secondary techniques in his teachings, presumably as a concession, the question arises concerning the spiritual status of the path of the arhant, which is not a specifically Buddhist attainment but is mentioned by the Jains, *samanas,* and others as a non-ultimate attainment intermediate between the path of heaven and buddhahood.

The Noble Search

Majjhima Nikaya 26

This sutta is also known as the Pasarasi Sutta, the Heap of Snares. Here the Buddha is at Savatthi, where the Buddha spent twenty-four of forty-five rainy seasons after the Enlightenment. As the birthplace of the third Tirthankara of the Jain faith, this prosperous trading centre was known for its religious associations. It was the capital of Kosala, whose king, Pasenadi, followed the Buddha. The Buddha's chief lay follower, the wealthy householder Anathapindika, who gave many gifts to the sangha, also lived here.

Interestingly, only six of the suttas in the Digha Nikaya are set in Savatthi, whereas seventy-five in the Majjhima Nikaya are set here. Despite the greater number of suttas in the Majjhima Nikaya, 49% of the Majjhima Nikaya's suttas are set here, compared to only 15% in the Digha Nikaya. This is a significant difference, which suggests that the redactors of the Majjhima Nikaya consciously collected discourses from Savatthi, amongst others, compared to the redactors of the Digha Nikaya. The discourses of the Digha Nikaya, on the other hand, are more diverse and eclectic, with a slight preference for Rajagaha (21%), the capital of Magadha, whose king, Bimbisara, is also a patron of the Buddha.

One wonders whether the Digha Nikaya is associated with the Rajagaha sangha, whereas the Majjhima Nikaya is associated with the Savatthi sangha. This might be the organizational principle that I referred to in connection with the Digha Nikaya. A quick survey of the Samyutta and Anguttara Nikayas also suggests that they largely emphasize Savatthi, making the Digha Nikaya the odd one out.

The Buddha is staying in Anathapindika's Park, in Jeta's Grove. Some monastics approach Ananda and complain that it is a long time since they have heard the Buddha speak: Could Ananda arrange a dharma talk by the Buddha? Ananda tells them to go to the Brahman Rammaka's hermitage.

After alms round, the morning meal, and spending the afternoon meditating, followed by a bath, Ananda asks the Buddha to go to Rammaka's hermitage. It seems that the Buddha knows that Ananda wants him to give a dharma talk, since Ananda qualifies his request by asking the Buddha to go there "out of compassion." Either that, or by these words Ananda is informing the Buddha of the purpose of the visit by implication.

When the Buddha arrives at the hermitage, he hears several monastics discussing the dharma. Waiting outside for their conversation to end, the Buddha very properly coughs, knocks, and the monastics open the door for him. The Buddha asks the monastics what they are discussing, in reply to which they tell him that they are discussing the Buddha himself. Unfortunately, the sutta does not give us the details of their talk, which would be fascinating to hear. The Buddha commends the monastics for discussing the dharma, and tells them that when they gather at the new and full moons twice a month as well as during the four months of the rainy season they should either discuss the dharma or maintain "noble silence." Bodhi notes that this is also the name of the second meditative attainment (*jhana*), characterized, as we know, by the cessation of thinking and the realization of rapture or bliss "with the body." Such practices shut down the egological cognitive faculty, revealing sentience to itself as it actually is in itself.

The Buddha identifies two kinds of seeking—noble and ignoble. A*rya,* 'noble,' is synonymous with 'supermundane.' Ignoble seeking is the seeking after samsaric things, which perpetuates the whole phantasmagoria of samsara, filled with illusory objects of attachment, which all cause angst.

We are accustomed to think of those things subject to birth, ageing, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement as referring to living or sentient beings, including wives, children, slaves, and various animals, so the Buddha's inclusion of "gold and silver" in this list is fascinating. Gold or silver are included in the list of things subject to birth, ageing, and defilement, but not sickness, death, and sorrow, which apply only to people and animals. Gold and silver (i.e., money) are the only inanimate objects included in this list of samsaric objects, suggesting their importance as an object of attachment in the mind of the Buddha.

Noble seeking is the seeking after the "unborn supreme security from bondage," which the Buddha identifies with nirvana (lit. 'quenching'). The reference to "unborn" indicates the transcendental object, also indicated by the references to the unageing, unailing, deathless (i.e., immortal), sorrowless, and undefiled. *Therefore, seeking the transcendental object itself is the noble seeking.* Nirvana is not merely the realization of a state, but it is also an ontological realization of the single "element" that is beyond the three characteristics of transience, non-self-identity, and angst, identical with reality itself.

The Buddha identifies himself before he became a buddha as a bodhisattva. At that time, he questioned why, as a samsaric being, he is attracted to samsaric objects of experience. This question segues into an alternative description of the Buddha's leaving home, "while still young." He says that his parents wept when he left home, rather than the stock description that he stole out of the palace in the middle of the night soon after his son, Rahula, was born, out of despair for the suffering of the world. What age is referred to is also uncertain.

The Buddha tells the monastics the story of his life. First, the bodhisattva goes to Alara Kalama and studies his dharma and discipline until he attains the experience of the base of nothingness, the second highest plane of the thirty-one planes of existence (and in some variations, the highest plane). This is of course the seventh meditative attainment. Kalama recognizes Gotama's attainment and invites him to lead his community of *samanas* with him as equals, but Gotama, realizing that this attainment only leads to rebirth in the deva world corresponding to the base of nothingness, declines.

Then he goes to Uddaka Ramaputta ('son of Rama'), with whom he realizes the base of neither perception nor non-perception—the highest plane of samsara. Uttara recognizes Gotama's attainment, and offers him the leadership of his (actually Rama's, presumably deceased) group of *samanas*. As with his previous teacher, however, Gotama realizes that this attainment only leads to rebirth in the deva world corresponding to the base of neither perception nor non-perception and declines.

This sutta does not refer to the descriptions, found elsewhere in the Pali Canon, of the Buddha's conquest of fear in the forest and the six years he spent practising self-mortification with the Group of Five. Instead, Gotama wanders through Magadha until he arrives at Senanigama near Uruvela, where he finds a delightful grove with a clear flowing river with smooth banks and a nearby village for alms round. Here he sits, intent on his quest, aspiration, or striving. Uruvela is now the site of Bodh Gaya, where Gotama attained Enlightenment.

Here the Buddha attains the unborn, unageing, unailing, deathless, sorrowless, and undefiled nirvana state, declaring: "My deliverance is

unshakeable; this is my last birth; now there is no renewal of being."[410] The sutta provides no explanation of the Buddha's attainment of enlightenment other than the fact itself. It just occurs, apparently spontaneously.

At first, the Buddha is inclined to become a *pateccabuddha* and not teach others, due to the profundity and difficulty of the dharma, "unattainable by mere reasoning," on the one hand, and the samsaric attachment of the people on the other. The Pali word is *alaya,* literally something like 'living in the illusion of attachment to desire,' alluding perhaps to the home life. Nanamoli and Bodhi's translation, 'adhesion,' is rather unsatisfactory to my mind. The statement that the Buddha would find this wearisome and troubling is interesting given his presumed supermundane attainment at this stage, suggesting that enlightenment by no means wipes out the human personality as one might think.

> Enough with teaching the Dharma
> That even I found hard to reach;
> For it will never be perceived
> By those who live in lust and hate.
> Those dyed in lust, wrapped in darkness
> Will never discern this abstruse Dhamma
> Which goes against the worldly stream,
> Subtle, deep, and difficult to see.

Clearly, the commentaries see this as a problem, resulting in the improbable sophistry documented by Bodhi in a footnote. This is supported by the Buddha subsequently seeking out opportunities for retreat and continuing to meditate for the rest of his life.

The Buddha seems to identify nirvana with interdependent origination, also referred to as "specific conditionality," stilling the formations (i.e., volition or intention), relinquishing attachment, and destroying craving.

Discerning the Buddha's thoughts from his position as a higher-dimensional being, for whom the minds of humans are open books—a quality shared by UFOs, interestingly—the Brahma Sahampati, the chief Mahabrahma, despairs that without the Buddha's wisdom the world will perish,

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[410] M 26.18.

so he entreats the Buddha to teach for the sake of the few "with little dust in their eyes."[411]

The Buddha compares people to lotuses, some of which thrive immersed in the water, others of which rest on the water's surface, and still others that rise out of the water but are unwetted. In all these cases, of course, the lotus continues to be rooted in the mud (samsara).

The Buddha assents to Sahampati's request, who departs, thinking that he has earned merit by being the cause of the Buddha's teaching the people.

When he discovers that both Alara Kalama and Uttara Ramaputta are recently deceased, the Buddha decides to teach the dharma to the Group of Five. These are, of course, the five ascetics with whom the Buddha practised self-mortification for six years prior to his Enlightenment. He discovers that they are now living in the Deer Park at Isipatana, near Benares.

En route, the Buddha encounters an *ajivaka* named Upaka. The *ajivakans* were non-theistic communitarian amoralist renunciates believing in absolute atomic determinism, followers of Makkhali Gosala of Magadha who was a contemporary of Mahavira and the Buddha. Upaka sees the clarity of the Buddha's complexion and asks him the name of his teacher, whereupon the Buddha declares his Buddhahood for the first time. Upaka remarks that the Buddha is claiming to be a Universal Victor (*anantajina,* lit. 'one who has conquered all'), which the Buddha confirms.

> I am one who has transcended all, a knower of all,
> Unsullied among all things, renouncing all,
> By craving's ceasing freed. Having known this all
> For myself, to whom should I point as teacher?
> I have no teacher, and one like me
> Exists nowhere in all the world
> With all its gods, because I have
> No person for my counterpart.
> I am the Accomplished One in the world,
> I am the Teacher Supreme.
> I alone am a Fully Enlightened One
> Whose fires are quenched and extinguished.
> I go now to the city of Kasi
> To set in motion the Wheel of Dhamma.

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[411] M 26.21.

In a world that has become blind
I go to beat the drum of the Deathless.

Upaka's response is interesting: "May it be so, friend."[412] Shaking his head, Upaka takes another path and leaves the Buddha alone. Arriving at the Deer Park, the Group of Five sees the Buddha coming in the distance but they allow him to sit with them. At first they resist him, regarding him as "living in luxury," an accusation that would haunt the Buddha for the rest of his life. However, as the Buddha begins to speak about immortality, the dharma, and gnosis they find themselves unable to resist his eloquence. The text implies that they are literally mesmerized. Nevertheless, they ask the Buddha how he can claim to be an Accomplished, Fully Enlightened One, when he does not exhibit any transcendent states, wisdom, or vision characteristic of those who have attained: Since he gave up self-mortification, how can he claim to be enlightened? However, the Buddha, now referring to himself in the third person as the Tathagata, denies the truth of the accusation that he has given up asceticism and lives in luxury. Apparently, this denial is enough, and the monastics address Gotama from that point as the Tathagata, implicitly accepting his authority.

According to tradition, the Buddha then teaches the Group of Five the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, the Discourse that Set the Wheel of Dharma in Motion (S 56.11). The Buddha gives a sermon on the Middle Way, the Noble Eightfold Path, the Tathagata, the Four Noble Truths, enlightenment, and non-rebirth.

Although the text suggests that the conversion of the Group of Five was rather easy, the Buddha says, "I was able to convince the bhikkhus of the group of five."[413] Assuming that Nanamoli and Bodhi's translation of "convince" is accurate, this word suggests that some effort was required on the Buddha's part, which seems to be a more reasonable supposition in the circumstances.

Thus, the nucleus of the sangha was formed, consisting of the Buddha and the Group of Five. The first thing the Buddha does is to "teach and instruct" the monastics. The Buddha teaches them in groups of two or three, while the others get alms; this is how they lived. Two weeks later

[412] M 26.25.
[413] M 26.29.

the Buddha teaches them the Anattalakkhana Sutta (S 22.59), the Discourse Concerning the Property of Non-self-identity.

The Buddha discourses on non-self-identity, the Five Aggregates, transience, angst, revulsion (i.e., for samsara), and liberation. At the end of the sermon, all the members of the Group of Five attain arhantship! There are other passages in the Pali Canon that suggest that arhantship can be attained in as short a time as five or seven days. The Eighteen Schools all differ in their view of the spiritual state of an arhant, but the speed with which many of the Buddha's followers attain arhantship lends credence to the view of a significant number of schools that arhantship is not the final or ultimate attainment. Thus, the Buddha concludes the biographical portion of the sutta.

The Buddha reverts to his original topic of ignoble seeking, whereby samsaric beings seek samsaric objects that lead to angst. *Why this is so was the Buddha's original question that led him to renounce the home life.* Thus, he identifies the five "cords" of sensual pleasure, connected with the five senses. Such ignoble seekers are subject to Mara, the asura deva associated with matter and samsara. Noble seekers, who abandon sensual pleasure, are, on the other hand, liberated from Mara's demesne.

The Buddha proceeds to explain the four meditative attainments, the jhanas. Very concisely, the first jhana, transcendent meditative attainment or 'ecstasy,' is characterized by seclusion, thinking, and bliss. The second jhana is characterized by self-confidence, mental concentration, the cessation of thinking, and bliss. The third jhana is characterized by equanimity, attention, and physical pleasure. The fourth jhana is characterized by neither pleasure nor pain, attention (awareness), and equanimity.

This sutta describes the formless jhanas as well, consisting of the progressive realization of the base of infinite space, the base of infinite consciousness, the base of nothingness, and the base of neither perception nor non-perception, which opens to the trans-dual.

Finally, the Buddha describes the supermundane state of the cessation of perception and feeling, whereby seeing with wisdom destroys the taints. W*isdom is the essential salvific principle.* "This bhikkhu is said to have blindfolded Mara, to have become invisible to the Evil One by depriving Mara's eye of opportunity, and to have crossed beyond attachment to the world. He walks without fear, stands without fear, sits without fear, lies

down without fear. Why is that? Because he is out of the Evil One's range."[414]

[414] M 26.42.

Discourse to Upali

Majjhima Nikaya 56

The location of this sutta is Nalanda, Magadha, near Rajagaha, in Pavarika's Mango Grove. The Pali name for Mahavira, the Tirthankara of the Jains who lived about the same time as the Buddha, is Nataputta, the Jains themselves being referred to as 'naked ascetics' (*niganthas*). The sutta tells us that Mahavira—I will use the more familiar terms henceforth—is staying at Nalanda with a large gathering of Jains. One of these, Digha Tapassi by name, visits the Buddha after alms round. After exchanging courtesies, the Buddha invites him to sit. The Buddha proceeds to quiz Digha Tapassi about the teachings of Mahavira.

The Buddha asks him, "How many kinds of action does the Nigantha Nataputta describe for the performance of evil action, for the perpetration of evil action?"[415] A vexed question for sure! Nataputta's reply is even more obscure: "Friend Gotama, the Nigantha Nataputta is not accustomed to use the description 'action, action'; the Nigantha Nataputta is accustomed to use the description 'rod, rod.'"[416] Bodhi opines that "the Jains regarded bodily, verbal, and mental activity as instruments by which the individual torments himself by prolonging his bondage in samsara and torments others by causing them harm,"[417] the rod being an instrument of punishment (as in the English idiom, "spare the rod, spoil the child"). The Buddha reformulates what seems to be a semantic distinction to how many kinds of *rod* Mahavira "describes." Tapassi's answer is that Mahavira teaches three kinds of "rod": body, speech, and mind (in Vajrayana these are called the Three Vajras—"mysteries" in Tendai and Shingon—but, perhaps not surprisingly by now, are found explicitly formulated in the Pali Canon as the three primary karmic factors). The point is that Mahavira recognizes body and speech as independent karmic causal factors in addition to mind. Of course, this contradicts the Buddhist view that intention alone causes karma, and leads to a completely different view of the path that involves inaction and self-mortification. This sutta is another demonstration of the Buddha's dialectical method.

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[415] M 56.3.
[416] Ibid.
[417] *Middle Length Discourses,* p. 1255, n. 579.

The Buddha asks Tapassi which of the three Mahavira considers the "most reprehensible for the performance of evil action,"[418] to which Tapassi replies that Mahavira considers the bodily rod to be most reprehensible. Tapassi then asks the Buddha which "rod" he considers most reprehensible. The Buddha replies that he does not use the description "rod" but rather uses the description of "action," thus inverting the original statement. He replies that he also considers each of the three kinds of action to be independent of each other, but with mental action as the most reprehensible. Thus, the Buddha distinguishes his teaching from that of Mahavira in two respects:

1. The use of the term "action" instead of "rod."
2. That mental instead of physical action is the most reprehensible.

Bodhi suggests that "mental action" may refer to volition or intention as the root of karma, but (he says) the commentary identifies "mental action" with wrong view.

Tapassi then goes to visit Mahavira, possibly in or near Balaka, thus dating this sutta prior to the death of Mahavira about 425 BCE, somewhat before the passing of the Buddha himself about 400 BCE.[419] Just as the Buddha was interested in what Mahavira thought, so Mahavira is interested in the teachings of the Buddha.

Mahavira praises Tapassi's explanation of Mahavira's teachings and declares that the mental "rod" is insignificant compared with the bodily rod—the precise opposite view to that of the Buddha.

Upali, Mahavira's foremost disciple, declares that he will go to the Buddha and defeat him in argument on this point, but Tapassi warns him that "the recluse Gotama is a magician and knows a converting magic by which he converts disciples of other sectarians."[420] One is reminded of the Buddha's reason for rejecting the cultivation or demonstration of psychic powers. However, Mahavira dismisses this objection and encourages Upali to go and refute the Buddha's doctrine. He even suggests the Buddha might convert to Jainism!

Upali goes to see the Buddha. The Buddha declares, "If you will debate on the basis of truth, we might have some conversation about this,"[421] thus

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[418] M 56.4.
[419] Cf. D 29.
[420] M 56.8.
[421] M 56.10.

establishing the proper basis for any discussion of Buddhist doctrines. Upali agrees. Elsewhere the Buddha emphasizes "common ground" in mutually constructive but critical dialogue.

The Buddha presents Upali with a scenario. Suppose (the Buddha says) a Jain were sick and needed cold water to live. However, Jainism prohibits the use of cold water because it might contain living organisms (a distinction that we now know to be false, both hot and cold water containing living organisms). Nevertheless, he longs for the cold water that would save his life. Thus, he keeps his vows physically and verbally but he violates them mentally. In what state (the Buddha asks) would he be reborn?

Upali replies that "there are gods called 'mind-bound'; he would be reborn there … [b]ecause when he died he was still bound [by attachment] in the mind."[422] The Buddha replies that Upali contradicts himself, presumably because the Jain's rebirth is determined exclusively by his mental attachment. Thus, his mental attachment is more important than his (lack of) physical attachment. Nevertheless, Upali reasserts his original statement that physical action is the most reprehensible.

Next, the Buddha forces Upali to admit that Mahavira teaches that nonvolitional infractions of moral law are not demeritorious (as in Buddhism). The Buddha then asks Upali which rod "willing" pertains to. Upali is forced to admit that it pertains to the mental rod, once again proving the Buddha's point. Once again Upali reasserts his original statement that physical action is the most reprehensible.

The next argument of the Buddha refers to the notion of psychic powers. He asks Upali whether someone with a sword could kill off the inhabitants of Nalanda (the town where they were at the time) singlehandedly. Upali agrees that such a notion is absurd. However, says the Buddha, can a recluse or Brahman with "supernormal power and attained to mastery of mind" do so by an "act of hate"?[423] This is of course the situation of the great Tibetan saint Milarepa, who started his quest as a sorcerer. *Upali agrees that he could.* Therefore, the Buddha points out that the mental rod is greater and more powerful than the physical rod, once again contradicting Upali's original view. Nevertheless, Upali reasserts his original statement that physical action is the most reprehensible.

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[422] M 56.11.
[423] M 56.13.

Next, similar to the previous point, the Buddha reminds Upali that according to tradition the Dandaka, Kalinga, Mejjha, and Matanga forests became forests by means of a mental act of hate on the part of the seers. The foregoing establishes quite clearly that the Pali Canon clearly asserts the reality of psychic, supernormal, or magical powers.

The Buddha reminds Upali that he agreed to debate based on truth, yet every answer that he gives contradicts his premise. Upali admits that he agreed with the Buddha from the very first example, yet he continues to oppose him in order to "hear the Blessed One's varied solutions to the problem," whereupon he takes refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha for life as a lay follower. The Buddha exhorts Upali to "investigate thoroughly, householder. It is good for such well-known people like you to investigate thoroughly."[424] Upali contrasts the Buddha's commitment to inquiry with the attitude of other sectarians, thus clearly distinguishing Buddhism from sectarianism. The Buddha even advises Upali to continue to give alms to the Jains based on his long association with them. Once again, Upali praises the Buddha for recommending that Upali give gifts to others and not only to the Buddha and his followers.

The Buddha gives Upali "progressive instruction" on giving, virtue, the "heavens" (i.e., higher dimensions of reality), the danger of sensual pleasures, and the blessing of renunciation, i.e., a general religious talk as we have seen elsewhere, followed by a "special" teaching on the Four Noble Truths. "The spotless immaculate vision of the Dhamma arose in"[425] Upali, and he realizes the universality of arising and cessation. Immediately he becomes a stream entrant.

Returning home, Upali advises his "doorkeeper" not to admit Jains to his home because he is now following the Buddha. If they need alms, however, they should wait and alms will be brought to them at the door.

Digha Tapassi hears that Upali has converted to the *Buddhadharma,* which he reports to Mahavira. Mahavira does not believe it, and asks Tapassi to go to Upali's home to verify that this is true, which he does. Mahavira still does not believe it, and goes to Upali's home himself, together with a large number of his followers, and asks to see Upali, who meets with them in his home "in the hall of the central door," perhaps

[424] M 56.16.
[425] M 56.18.

some sort of antechamber or parlour. Whereas before Upali would give Mahavira the best seat, Upali himself takes the best seat, to Mahavira's chagrin.

Mahavira becomes abusive, and accuses Upali of insanity, being caught up in the Buddha's "net of doctrine" and seduced by his "converting magic." Upali does not deny this, but rather praises the Buddha's "converting magic." Bodhi notes that Upali refers specifically to his attainment of stream entry.

Upali replies by means of a parable that "the doctrine of the foolish [Jains] will give delight to fools but not to the wise, and it will not withstand testing or being smoothened out,"[426] comparing Mahavira's teachings to a monkey! On the other hand, Upali says that "the doctrine of that Blessed One, accomplished and fully enlightened, will give delight to the wise but not to fools, and it will withstand testing and being smoothened out,"[427] comparing the teachings of the Buddha to new garments.

Mahavira points out that Upali is known to the king and the Jain congregation as a follower of Mahavira, and asks him whose follower he should now be considered to be. Upali's response is curious, in that it implies that he is wearing robes (perhaps the white robes of a lay person?). It also seems to imply the presence of the Buddha, since the text says that he "extended his hands in reverential salutation in the direction of the Blessed One"[428] (perhaps the direction where the Blessed One is staying?), and recites a poem in praise of the qualities of the Buddha in response to Mahavira's question, which he compares to a heap of flowers.

Upali praises the Buddha using many epithets, including the Wise One, the Blessed One, the Illuminator, the Hero, the Best of Seers, the Noble One, the Tathagata, the Sublime One, and the Enlightened One.

The poem compares the task of the arhant to that of a soldier, in keeping with the Buddha's caste. Like an elephant, he is the victor in battle, the excellent leader, and the leader of the herd.

However, most of all the Buddha is described by his psychological qualities. He is undeluded, unperplexed, confident, sorrowless, content, aware, insightful, skilful and able (punning on the Shakyan family name

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[426] M 56.27.
[427] Ibid.
[428] M 56.28.

from which the Buddha comes), conversant, balanced, honest, humble, unworldly, ethical, wise, free, quiet, restrained, happy, beyond any possibility of temptation or vice, independent, fearless, completely self-possessed, retired, and dispassionate. Above all, he is the Tathagata who liberates and frees himself from the inveiglements of rebirth. The Buddha is explicitly affirmed to have gained the Triple Knowledge, i.e., the traditional knowledge of the Vedas that underlies Brahmanism that in Buddhism refers to past lives, karma, and the cessation of the taints.

One can discern a broad development in the stanzas of the poem, beginning with the Wise One whose knowledge is perfect. As such, he is the leader, the bull elephant, especially in the realm of religion, wherein he achieves the zenith of realization, characterized as dispassionate wisdom and freedom from involuntary rebirth.

> Most worthy of gifts, most mighty of spirits,
> Most perfect of persons, beyond estimation,
> The greatest in grandeur, attained the peak of glory:
> The Blessed One is he, and I am his disciple.

This poem causes Mahavira to vomit hot blood, who is carried away to Pava on a litter, where he dies, thus dating the sutta to about 425 BCE.

A Safe Bet

Majjhima Nikaya 60

The Buddha is staying in the village of Sala, after wandering through Kosala with his entourage. Kosala was a monarchy whose king, Pasenadi, was a follower of the Buddha. Pasenadi was dethroned by his minister who placed Pasenadi's son on the throne. Pasenadi subsequently dies of exposure. Soon after Kosala is annexed by the kingdom of Magadha.

The Brahman householders of Sala hear of this, and they go to visit him. Sala is located at the entrance to a forest, where many different recluses and Brahmans stay, all disputing with each other as to whose view is best. Thus, the Buddha asks whether the householders rationally prefer any particular teacher. The householders reply that they have not found such a teacher. The Buddha offers to teach them a dharma that is without fault and leads to welfare and happiness.

Many Westerners think of ancient India in rather fanciful terms, but the Buddha's statement shows us that ancient India was not only spiritual. At least some people denied the value of merit, karma, rebirth, filial duty, spiritual beings, and spiritual realizations. This is the sort of rationalist nihilism that pervades much modern thinking.

The nihilist view is opposed by its opposite, which the Buddha identifies with the dharma. Here *dharma* is used in the broad sense to refer to all those who maintain what we might call a religious world-view, including merit, karma, rebirth, filial duty, spiritual beings, and spiritual realizations.

The Buddha objects that nihilists tend to act in unethical ways because they have no reason not to do so. For this reason, he accuses nihilism of fostering corruption. Thus, nihilism presents a problem that must be solved.

The Buddha's ingenious solution is to consider the consequences of accepting one view or the other in terms of whether what each asserts is true or false.

If there is no rebirth, then the nihilist is safe from suffering in terms of a non-existent afterlife but is reviled in this world as a dishonourable person and, if there is rebirth, they are reborn in a hellish state, whereas, if there is no rebirth, the dharma practitioner is respected in life as an honourable person and, if there is rebirth, then they go to heaven. Comparing the choice of which to believe to the arbitrary throws of games of chance,

the Buddha says that the nihilist has made two "unlucky throws" in that they suffer in this life and in the next. One can taste the irony in the Buddha's application of the phrase "good person" to the nihilist as he explains the moral consequences of this choice of world-view. Similarly, the dharma practitioner has made two good "throws," since they will benefit in both lives. In this way, the Buddha asserts that dharma is the incontrovertible or "faultless" teaching.

In Digha Nikaya 1, the Buddha refutes sixty-two kinds of wrong view. Similarly, in this sutta he summarizes and refutes five wrong views along the same lines.

These doctrines bear many similarities to the *samana* philosophies of the Buddha's time, including amoralism, fatalism, materialism, eternalism, Jainism, and agnosticism. Reading the doctrines of these schools, one realizes that they all seem to be varieties of nihilism. The Buddha summarizes five doctrines of wrong view, to which he applies the same sort of analysis.

Doctrines of Wrong View

1. There is nothing given, nothing offered, nothing sacrificed; no karma; no this world, no other world; no mother, no father; no beings who are reborn spontaneously; no good and virtuous recluses and Brahmans in the world who have themselves realized by direct knowledge and declare this world and the other world. (Nihilism)

2. When one acts or makes others act, when one mutilates or makes others mutilate, when one tortures or makes others inflict torture, when one inflicts sorrow or makes others inflict sorrow; when one oppresses or makes others inflict oppression, when one intimidates or makes other inflict intimidation, when one kills living beings, steals, breaks into houses, plunders wealth, burgles, ambushes highways, seduces another's wife, utters falsehood—no evil is done by the doer. (Non-doing)

3. There is no cause or condition for the defilement of beings; beings are defiled without cause or condition. There is no cause or condition for the purification of beings; beings are purified without cause or condition. There is no power, no energy, no manly [sic] strength, and no manly [sic] endurance. All beings, living things, creatures, and souls are without mastery, power, and energy; moulded by destiny, circumstance, and nature they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes. (Non-causality)

4. There are no immaterial realms.

5. There is no cessation of being.

The doctrine that "if, with a razor-rimmed wheel, one were to make the living beings on this earth into one mass of flesh, into one heap of flesh, because of this there would be no evil and no outcome of evil"[429] is that of Purana Kassapa. Purana teaches a theory of non-action, in which there are no soul, merit, or demerit. The core of Purana's doctrine is that he denies the Law of Karma. Purana, who claims to be omniscient, eventually drowns himself. Presumably, Purana's actual ethic consists of doing nothing; hence the name.

The doctrine that suffering is inherent is the philosophy of the *ajivikas,* founded by Makkhali Gosala. The *ajivikas* believe in predestination, so that no one can do anything to alleviate suffering.

The reference to "manly strength" is interesting. "Energy" (*viriya*) is related to the etymological root referring to the male gender (virility) (cf. Taoist *te,* lit. 'virtue,' from Lat. *vir,* man). This is also the energy by which the Buddha is able to defer his passing for three months, and might have done so for twenty or more years if Ananda asked. In the primordial philosophy, the male or "psychic" polarity is commonly identified with the spiritual principle,[430] and the female with the somatic or physical principle. This relates to the spiritual misogyny that one finds for example in the Roman Church and which one also finds in the Pali Canon. Various Indian spiritual theories concerning sexuality also underlie Indian misogyny as well as Muslim and British influences. However, the Buddha himself does not appear to have been a misogynist, as I have discussed at length in "The Status of Women in Ancient India and the Pali Tradition." The doctrines that there are no immaterial realms and no cessation of being, i.e., nirvana, suggest the philosophy of materialism.

The final section of the sutta on the four kinds of persons has little to do with the incontrovertible teaching and seems to have been spliced in as we also see in other suttas. This section summarizes part of sutta 51, in which people are classified according to whether they torment and torture themselves and/or others. The person who torments himself is the ascetic. The person who torments others is anyone who follows a bloody

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[429] D 2.17.

[430] The cultivation of this quality is the focus of the Gokulika or Kukkutika school of early Buddhism (3rd cent. BCE). See Warder, *Indian Buddhism,* p. 235, n. 4.

occupation, such as butchers, fowlers, trappers, etc. Those who torment themselves and others include kings and Brahmans. Finally, one who does not torment themselves or others is the tathagata. This classification covers all the general classes of person in the Buddha's world, including ascetics, householders, nobles, Brahmans, and arhants. After hearing this, the Brahman householders of Sala become lay followers of the Buddha.

The Greater Discourse to Sakuludayin

Majjhima Nikaya 77

The location of this sutta is the Squirrel's Sanctuary in the Bamboo Grove, located in or near Rajagaha (modern Rajgir) in Magadha. The Buddha is frequently portrayed in the Pali suttas as an early bird, waking up too early to go on alms round, as is the case here. Therefore, he goes to the Peacocks' Sanctuary. Here a number of well-known wanderers are staying, including Sakuludayin. The Buddha addresses Sakuludayin as Udayin. Here we encounter another familiar motif of the wanderer surrounded by a noisy group of wanderers, discussing and debating with each other in the early morning hours (cf. M 76). This must have been a common occurrence in northeast India in the fifth century BCE, and seems to have been imitated in the Tibetan monastic schools, where formal debates were used as a pedagogical device. At the Buddha's approach, Udayin shushes the crowd of wanderers.

Udayin welcomes the Buddha, and deferentially sits beside him on a low stool, whereupon the Buddha asks about the topic of discussion he has interrupted. Deferring the Buddha's question, Udayin asks a question of his own. We have seen this familiar trope in other suttas too.

Udayin tells the Buddha that they are discussing the leaders of the sects of the time, including Purana Kassapa, Makkhali Gosala, Ajita Kesakambali, Pakudha Kaccayana, Sanjaya Belatthiputta, Nigantha Nataputta (Mahavira), and Gotama himself, asking who is honoured, respected, revered, and venerated by his disciples? How many live in dependence on him? On the contrary, all these sects are notorious for dissension, except for that of Gotama.

We recognize in these names the major sectarian philosophies of the Buddha's time: amoralism, fatalism, materialism, eternalism, agnosticism, asceticism (Jainism), and Buddhism respectively.

The Buddha then asks Udayin to name five qualities for which the Buddha is honoured and respected. The Buddha clearly enjoys setting these sorts of didactic traps, in which he undermines his interlocutor's assumptions by asking apparently innocuous but probing questions. Udayin names:

1. Moderate eating;
2. Indifference as to clothing;
3. Indifference as to food;

4. Indifference as to abode; and
5. Seclusion.

All these are essentially ethical precepts. **However, the Buddha says that they are all untrue and gives examples to prove it.** *Thus, the Buddha says that sometimes he eats the full contents on his alms bowl or even more; he wears fine robes; he accepts invitations to eat fine foods; he lives in gabled mansions; and he is surrounded by an entourage, both monastic and sectarian, both male and female.* **The Buddha does not lead an ascetic lifestyle.** He freely admits in this passage that there are many monastics that live more ascetic lives than he does. I am reminded of the Buddha's derisive description of all the ethical precepts and practices in the Brahmajala Sutta, the first sutta of the Sutta Pitaka. Rather, the Buddha says, than honouring and respecting him for such qualities, Udayin should praise him for the higher virtues, knowledge and vision, the higher wisdom, the Four Noble Truths, and the Way to Develop Wholesome States. The difference between these qualities and the former ones is clear. The five qualities that Udayin praises are clearly external, superficial, rote observances of the same sort that the Buddha criticizes in other suttas. The qualities for which he should be truly praised are, on the contrary, internal, profound, and mindful. Similarly, elsewhere the Buddha states that the Three Higher Trainings supersede the Vinaya! In addition, in the Brahmajala Sutta the Buddha says that the Tathagata should be praised for his wisdom, not for his morality.

Thus, the Buddha declares that he possesses the supreme aggregates of virtue and wisdom; direct knowledge, or gnosis; the truths concerning suffering or angst; and the way to develop wholesome states, consisting of awareness; striving; spiritual power; transcendence; the *kasinas*; the spiritual faculties; the powers; the factors of enlightenment; the path; the liberations; the jhanas, or meditative attainments; insight; the mental body; paranormal powers; clairaudience; telepathy; memory of past lives; clairvoyance; and, finally, the destruction of the taints, the latter synonymous with emancipation. These nineteen components of the Way to Develop Wholesome States constitute a classification of the Buddhist path, more extensive than the Noble Eightfold Path, wherein the Noble Eightfold Path is merely one part. The nineteen components each seem to be independently capable of leading to consummate and perfect gnosis, since each one ends with a repetition of the statement that "thereby many disciples of mine abide having reached the consummation and perfection of

direct knowledge."[431] At the same time, the sequence presents a kind of development leading to emancipation. We have encountered most of the components of this way to develop wholesome states in previous suttas, especially the Four Foundations of Awareness, the Noble Eightfold Path, the Four Jhanas, the recollection of past lives, and the destruction of the taints. However, here I would like to discuss the Ten *Kasinas*.

The Pali Canon just glosses the dharma. This is especially true of the practices or exercises, which are often merely alluded to. The Ten *Kasinas* are like this. The Buddha simply refers to contemplating the earth, water, fire, air, blue, yellow, red, white, space, and consciousness *kasinas*, which are contemplated "above, below and across, the undivided and the immeasurable,"[432] like metta. *Kasina* means 'whole, entire.'

The *kasinas* seem to represent ten cosmic elements of being—four elements, four colours, space, consciousness; above, below, undivided, and immeasurable. By contemplating progressively more elemental and subtle states of being, the "vibration" or "frequency," for lack of a better word, of the state of one's consciousness adjusts to that level. Thus, one is able to induce progressively subtle levels of meditation by means of the *kasina* meditation, which also develops the mental power of concentration or will. Like the Four Roads to Power, which appear in this list as the Four Bases of Spiritual Power, consisting of zeal, energy, mind, and investigation, the *kasina* meditation has a tantric flavour inasmuch as it emphasizes visualization and concentration much like some, admittedly more complex, later tantric practices associated with mandalas. The *kasinas* also seem to be similar to the tattvas of the Hindu tantric tradition, which also entered the Western esoteric tradition through the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Thus, it is widely regarded with some suspicion as "edgy" or potentially dangerous, even though it was clearly recommended by the Buddha.[433]

The *kasina* system of meditation is described in the *Visuddhimagga,* written by Buddhaghosa about eight hundred years after the Buddha's passing. All that the sutta says is that "one contemplates the…kasina

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[431] M 77.15–36.

[432] M 77.24.

[433] See, for example, Ajahn Sudhiro, "Benefits and Dangers of Kasina Meditation," and the Bhavana Society of West Virginia, "The Dangers of Kasina Meditation" on YouTube.

above, below and across, undivided and immeasurable. And thereby many disciples of mine abide having reached the perfection and consummation of direct knowledge."[434] The method as taught today in the Theravada tradition involves focusing the attention on a representation of the element, such as a clay disk for earth. Over time, one develops an eidetic image in the mind, which then becomes the object of concentration. This is similar to how an unnamed monastic visited the deva realms in sutta 11 of the Digha Nikaya. This requires great mental concentration as well as involving the visualization faculty of the brain, which we now know stimulates the latent right hemisphere, associated with "oceanic" and mystical experiences. We know that the brain processes images very differently from verbal or textual information, and that images encode information much more efficiently than text, which is why symbols are psychologically powerful. This is how ancient and medieval memory systems worked, called the method of "loci of memory" or the "mind palace."[435] Visualization a core tantric technique too.

The Way to Develop Wholesome States

Four Foundations of Awareness: body, feelings, mind, mind-objects. *Discussed in the Mahasatipatthana Sutta* (D 22).

The Four Right Kinds of Striving: non-arising of unarisen evil states, abandoning of arisen evil states, arising of unarisen wholesome states, continuance of arisen wholesome states.

Four Bases for Spiritual Power: zeal, energy, purity of mind, investigation. *These are identical with the Four Roads to Power that appear in several suttas in the Digha Nikaya.*[436]

The Five Faculties or Powers: faith, energy, awareness, concentration, wisdom.

The Seven Enlightenment Factors: awareness, investigation of states, energy, rapture, tranquility, concentration, equanimity.

The Noble Eightfold Path: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right awareness, and right concentration.

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[434] M 77.24.
[435] See Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (1966; rpt. London: Routledge, 1999).
[436] See D 16.3.3, 18.22, 26.28, 28.3, and 33.1.11(3).

The Eight Liberations: (1) Possessed of material form, one sees forms; (2) Not perceiving forms internally, one sees forms externally; (3) One is resolved only upon the beautiful; (4) Space is infinite; (5) Consciousness is infinite; (6) There is nothing; (7) The base of neither perception nor non-perception; (8) Cessation of perception and feeling. *Note the similarity of the Eight Liberations to the Eight Jhanas.*

The Eight Bases for Transcendence: (1) Perceiving form internally, one sees forms externally, limited; (2) Perceiving form internally, one sees forms externally, immeasurable; (3) Not perceiving forms internally, one sees forms externally, limited; (4) Not perceiving forms internally, one sees forms externally, immeasurable; (5) Not perceiving forms internally, one sees forms externally, blue; (6) Not perceiving forms internally, one sees forms externally, yellow; (7) ... red; (8) ... white. *Note the similarity of the reference to blue, yellow, red, and white corresponding to the fifth through the eighth* kasinas *that follow.*

The Ten *Kasinas*: earth, water, fire, air, blue, yellow, red, white, space, consciousness. *Compare the Hindu tattvas—spirit, air, fire, water, earth, represented by a black oval, a blue circle, a red triangle, a white moon, and a yellow square respectively.*

The Four Jhanas: seclusion, concentration, rapture, pure bright mind. *Note the similarity of the typification of the fourth jhana as "pure bright mind" to the Buddha nature or clear light doctrines. This association of the fourth jhana with pure bright mind is not found in the Digha Nikaya, where the fourth jhana is simply associated with equanimity and awareness.*

Insight Knowledge: *The meaning seems to be that blue, yellow, red, and white threads, like the colours of the* kasinas, *represent the four great elements. The body, made up out of the same four elements, is like the threads, on which is strung a beautiful eight-faceted beryl gem of purest water, well cut, clear and limpid, possessed of all good, representing consciousness. Thus, consciousness is supported by and bound up with the body without being identical with it. Similarly, in his statement on his reincarnation, the Dalai Lama states "things are preceded by things of a similar type."*[437] *Thus, mental and material causes result in effects of the same kind. Material causes produce physical effects and mental causes create psychological*

[437] "Statement of the Dalai Lama on the Issue of His Reincarnation."

effects. The body may obstruct the manifestation of consciousness, but the body, essentially unconscious and inanimate, cannot be its cause. Therefore, consciousness and body are distinct, but commingled.

The Mind-Made Body: *Similarly, the mental body is generated by the psychosomatic complex, like pulling a reed from its sheath, a sword from its scabbard, or a snake from its slough. We know from other suttas that the way to create the mental body to which the Buddha alludes involves the attainment of the fourth jhana.*

The Kinds of Supernormal Power: Self-multiplication, invisibility, passing through matter, levitation. *We have encountered these before, of course, where I have noted the similarity of these powers to powers exhibited in three contexts known to us: dreaming, psychedelic experience, and the UFO experience, which is related to paranormal experiences in general. Although rare, these are experienced.*

The Divine Ear Element: This is commonly termed clairaudience, and includes hearing both divine and human sounds, both far and near.

Understanding the Minds of Others: *The description does not quite rise to the level of telepathy, since only broad mental states are intuited, but it comes close, including the ability to recognize minds liberated and not liberated. This is also a power of a buddha.*

The Recollection of Past Lives: *Note the cosmological reference to eons of world-contraction and expansion. Richard Gombrich notes that the recollection of past lives is paradoxical. Since samsara has no beginning, one's past lives should be infinite, but since memory is finite, how can one remember all one's past lives? Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence comes to mind.*

The Divine Eye: *The Divine Eye confers the capacity to discern the karmic patterns of cause and effect including the state of other individuals' rebirths.*

The Destruction of the Taints: *Note that the Mahasakuludayi Sutta represents the destruction of the taints, in which mind becomes like a clear, limpid, and undisturbed lake, as a way rather than as the goal or result of the way, corresponding presumably to a mode of meditation.* According to the postscript, Udayin is satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One's words, but there is no indication of conversion.

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The Discourse on Ratthapala

Majjhima Nikaya 82

The Buddha is wandering with his entourage in Kuru, in the northwest area of the *mahajanapadas,* reputedly descended from the quasi-mystical land of Uttarakuru, when he arrives at the town of Thullakotthita.

Ratthapala, a young man, of the dominant clan, the only son of a wealthy family, formulates the intention to become a monastic, so he visits the Buddha with a group of Brahman householders. After the Buddha gives a dharma talk, he stays behind and asks for ordination.

The Buddha asks Ratthapala if he has his parents' permission to join the sangha. Suddhodana, the Buddha's father, had asked the Buddha to institute this rule shortly after the Buddha's enlightenment. However, Ratthapala's parents do not consent, as he is their only son and they fear that, being raised in privilege, he would not be able to adjust to the life of a renunciate.

Ratthapala is so distraught that he collapses on the floor and declares that he will die there rather than not join the sangha. His parents call on Ratthapala's friends to encourage him to get up and enjoy the householder life, including making merit as an alternative to the holy life. The Thai edition of the Pali Canon states that Ratthapala fasted for seven days (otherwise the sutta simply states that Ratthapala is weak when he finally gets up). However, Ratthapala cannot be prevailed upon, so his friends encourage his parents to allow him to go forth with the argument that they can still see him from time to time and, if he does not like the monastic life, he can go back. Therefore, his parents relent on the condition that he visit them from time to time.

Ratthapala goes to the Buddha and informs him that he now has his parents' permission. The Buddha gives him full ordination. Later the Buddha declares Ratthapala to be the foremost of those gone forth in faith.

Subsequently, the Buddha wanders on to Savatthi (Shravasti), the capital of Kosala, where he stays in Jeta's Grove in Anathapindika's Park. Meanwhile Ratthapala works on himself in seclusion and attains arhantship. Bodhi notes that, whereas the text says that this occurred "before long," the commentary states, somewhat surprisingly, that it took twelve years, whereupon he resolves to visit his parents as agreed. The Buddha gives his permission, Ratthapala returns to Thullakotthita, staying in King

Moravya's Migacira Garden. Going on alms round, he comes to his father's house.

However, he is not welcome at his father's house, since his father blames the sangha for the loss of his son. Clearly, the Buddha is not popular everywhere or with everyone. It is not clear whether this abuse is at the hands of his father, who, the text points out, only sees him "in the distance," while he is having his hair done in "the hall of the central door," but when Ratthapala asks a slave woman to give him some porridge that she is about to throw out, she recognizes him. She tells this to Ratthapala's mother, who frees her out of gratitude, and tells Ratthapala's father. Meanwhile, Ratthapala is eating the porridge beside a shelter, showing that monastics also wandered solitary and took the alms for themselves, and even asked for alms. Ratthapala's father goes to him. Contrary to Bodhi's assertion, he seems to have no problem recognizing him, but is overcome by emotion and invites him to eat the porridge in his own house. Ratthapala, however, refuses, declaring that his meal for the day is done but he agrees to come the next morning for his daily meal.

Ratthapala's father then hatches a plan to seduce his son back to the household life, and calls upon Ratthapala's wives to put on their finery. He also piles up a large heap of gold coins and bullion and covers it with mats (a rather strange image; the Thai edition says that the money is hidden by a screen rather than by a mat). Finally, he prepares a meal of good food of various kinds. Next morning, he calls upon Ratthapala to come. When Ratthapala comes, his father offers him the gold—his maternal, paternal, and ancestral fortunes—and entreats him to return to the home life. Ratthapala, however, advises his father to dump the gold in the Ganges since it will bring him nothing but trouble.

His wives then ask Ratthapala what the nymphs (*apsaras*) are like for whose sake the monastics lead the life of renunciation.[438] This is a theme that comes up elsewhere in the Pali Canon, where the Buddha lures his

[438] The *apsaras* are female aerial spirits of clouds and water. They are beautiful, youthful, and elegant dancers and musicians, also translated as 'celestial maidens.' Sometimes they seduce devas and humans. *Apsaras* are also shape shifters. *Apsaras* are universal archetypal figures that appear in Greece as the muses and who also inhabit the Islamic celestial paradise. They also figure prominently in Tibetan Buddhism, especially in the writings of Padmasambhava, where they appear as *dakinis*.

stepbrother, Nanda, into the monastic life with the promise that he will encounter nymphs more beautiful than any woman,[439] despite the tradition that a Buddha cannot lie, but Ratthapala tells them that this is not the goal of the Buddha's monastics. Ratthapala refers to his wives as "sisters," and they faint away from shock or surprise. Ratthapala becomes impatient, and asks his father to stop harassing him but to give him the promised meal. His father serves him with his own hands. After eating, Ratthapala spontaneously composes and recites a poem in which he compares his wives to puppets, describing their bodies as sick, filthy, covered with sores, and skeletons in fancy dress. Since the skin is an excretory organ, this description is literally correct. He concludes:

> The deer-hunter set out the snare
> But the deer did not spring the trap;
> We ate the bait and now depart
> Leaving the hunters to lament.

Ratthapala returns to King Koravya's Magacira garden to spend the day in meditation at the foot of a tree, where the King's gamekeeper, who tells the king, sees him. The king goes to pay his respects, along with his most eminent officials. He brings an elephant rug for Ratthapala to sit on, but he disdains to do so.

The king observes that there are four reasons why many people undertake the monastic life, including ageing, sickness, poverty, and loss of family, but it seems that Ratthapala has not experienced any of these. Therefore, the king asks Ratthapala why he undertook the monastic life. Ratthapala's response is a fourfold summary of the dharma of transience or craving:

1. "Life in any world is unstable, it is swept away."
2. "Life in any world has no shelter and no protector."
3. "Life in any world has nothing of its own; one has to leave all and pass on."
4. "Life in any world is incomplete, insatiate, the slave of craving."[440]

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[439] Ud 3.2.
[440] M 82.41.

Note Ratthapala's rejection of "life in any world." The goal of Buddhism is not rebirth in a higher world or a mythical heaven, but rather the transcendence of the whole world system of samsara altogether.

The first principle relates to the doctrine of transience or change, one of the three characteristics of the world. The second principle refers to the absence of any redemptive principle, whether a God or otherwise. Rather, one's karma is one's own and must be borne by oneself alone. The third principle refers to the ubiquity of death, which is just another aspect of transience. At death, everything is abandoned. There is no continuity of property or possessions. The fourth principle refers to craving, which means that one is never satisfied and always seeking more than one has, in a vicious round (since everything is impermanent) that leads to unhappiness.

Ratthapala reasserts the primacy of wisdom as the essential salvific principle:

> Better is wisdom here than any wealth,
> Since by wisdom one gains the final goal.

Finally, he reiterates that karma follows one from life to life, perpetuating suffering.